

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

**An investigation into the social construction of 'problems'
through the case of boys and their education.**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the social construction of ‘problems’ related to boys’ education and solutions to them. It illustrates postmodernist arguments that ‘truth’ is relative and partial, knowledge is produced by and for particular interests, in particular contexts and at particular times (Scheurich, 1997), and poststructuralist arguments that how we think about problems is determined by available discourses. This is demonstrated through an analysis of the changing ways that boys’ behaviour and achievement have been problematised over the last twenty-five years.

My focus on boys and their education started with action research in boys’ schools in the 1980s. I revisit this research with the intention of analysing discourses about boys, and the conditions that made these discourses possible then. At this time feminist researchers and teachers identified boys’ behaviour as problematic for girls and women teachers (Askew and Ross, 1988a). Solutions included curriculum intervention to challenge boys’ sexism. Action research then suggested a ‘truth’ about boys, which contrasts with the ‘truth’ proposed by women teachers, the media, researchers and policy makers in the 2000s. Contemporary media discourse proposes boys are ‘underachieving’: the focus has shifted from behaviour to performance measured by external tests. Solutions now include boy-only classes in mixed schools, ‘boy-friendly’ schooling, and changes to pedagogy, examination processes and curriculum content. Deconstruction of discourses and solutions to ‘problems’ of boys’ behaviour and achievement highlights their textuality and challenges their ‘truth’.

The thesis contributes to understanding about:

- changing discourses about boys and contexts in which these discourses are produced, achieve a common-sense status that limits other possibilities and leads to policy decisions with doubtful logic and value
- the social function of identifying boys as a problem, or as having problems
- developing an archaeological (Foucault, 1972) research method to deconstruct educational ‘problems’
- ontological issues in research.

I hereby declare that except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Boys in crisis?

Several early sociological studies investigated the behaviour of specific groups of young men, for example, Thrasher's *The Gang* (1927) and Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (1943), without making 'masculinity' explicit or problematic. These early studies were focused on delinquency and deviance from the 'norm'. In the 1960s and 1970s some researchers were concerned with how socio-economic status affected boys' experiences in secondary schools (Hargreaves, 1967; Lacey, 1970; Willis, 1977; Halsey *et al*, 1980). These researchers found that working class boys left school earlier and achieved less. In these studies too, explanations were not focused on masculinity or sexuality. For example, Willis (1977) explained the 'lads' culture in terms of class-based resistance. The 'problem' of boys in school was subsumed under the 'problem' of working class underachievement (Delamont, 2001: 39):

The 'othering' of femininity by the 'lads' is represented in Willis' account as part of the process through which class relations are produced – through which certain young men draw upon and create a working-class identity – rather than as a particular mode of masculinity (Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002: 53).

In the 1980s gender equality in education was predominantly concerned with the education of girls: for example, girls' participation and achievement in mathematics, science and technology (Kelly, 1981; Culley, 1986; Whyte, 1986a); girls' stereotypical course choice (Gaskell, 1984) and vocational choices (Prout, 1983); harassment of girls in school (Jones, 1985; Mahoney, 1985); name-calling to put down girls and regulate them (Lees, 1986); objectification of girls and women teachers' bodies (Wood, 1984); stereotypical teacher expectations of girls in relation to interests and ability (Walkerdine, 1988); fewer images and stereotypical roles in reading schemes and other educational resources (Stones, 1983; Battersea County Women's Group, 1985); boys monopolisation of teacher time and physical space in the mixed sex classroom (Sarah and Spender, 1980; Stanworth, 1981); and sexist language in the school (Spender, 1980b and 1983, Walkerdine, 1985).

Boys, when the focus in the 1980s, were largely viewed as part of the 'problem' for girls, and boys' 'sexism' was examined in the feminist research and literature (Wood, 1984; Jones, 1985; Mahoney, 1985; Askew and Ross, 1988a, 1989). 'Solutions' tended to focus on challenging boys' 'sexism'. For example, from 1982-1984 I was appointed as an action researcher to teach, develop and evaluate a curriculum initiative, Skills for Living (SfL), for first and second year (years 7 and 8) boys in Woodland Boys School (WBS). WBS was the only school in the UK at this time¹ to design a core 'anti-sexist' course for first and second year pupils. Between 1984-

¹ Subsequently materials designed and produced for anti-sexist work with boys (Askew and Ross, 1990) were published nationally. These were used as part of other core subjects, for example, art, media studies, English

1986 I was seconded to work in the newly formed Local Education Authority (LEA) Equal Opportunities team for two years as one of four Advisory Teachers. My brief was to develop anti-sexist work with boys across the Authority, and support women teachers in boys' schools.

Since the mid-1990s there has been a shift, from seeing boys as 'a problem' to boys with 'problems' and a 'crisis' has been identified in relation to boys (O'Donnell and Sharpe 2000; Mac an Ghaill, 1994). From the early 1990s, over thirty books (see Appendix 1) and four hundred journal articles have been published in the UK exploring the 'crisis' in masculinity and suggesting solutions to the perceived problems (Seidler, 1989; Jukes, 1993; Salisbury and Jackson, 1996; Bleach, 1998; Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998; Head, 1999; Frosh, 1994, 2000; Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002; Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003). Eminent politicians and educationalists have stated that the 'underachievement' of boys is one of the 'main social issues', 'biggest challenges', 'disturbing problems', and 'important issues' of today. In 1999 Jack Straw, then Home Secretary, was prominently reported as saying that 'the main social issue of our time pertains to the behaviour and role of young men' (O'Donnell and Sharpe, 2000:1). These views are found in the following quotes (my emphasis):

As we enter the next millennium it is the under-achievement of boys that has become *one of the biggest challenges facing society today* (Ted Wragg, *Times Educational Supplement*. 16 May 1997).

The underachieving boy is *one of the most disturbing problems facing the education system* (Chris Woodhead, then Chief Inspector for Schools. *The Times Magazine*, 30 March 1996).

This book addresses *one of the most important issues of our time* and it does so compellingly (preface to Bleach, 1998. 'Raising Boys' Achievement in Schools'. Professor Tim Brighouse, then Chief Education Officer for Birmingham).

Since the early 1990s regular claims in the English speaking press have asserted that boys are in 'crisis', 'failing' and 'outperformed' by girls. For example:

and PSHE. However, as far as I am aware SFL remains the only timetabled course of its kind in the UK ever to have as its main aim anti-sexist work with boys.

'Girls Trounce The Boys In Education League Tables' (*The Times*. 3rd. September 1994)

'The War On Boys' (America, *Men's Health*. October 1994)

'Inquiry Tips Single Sex Classes To Help Boys' (*The Australian Sunday Telegraph*. 1st May 1994)

'Hard Times For Britain's Lost Boys' (*The New Scientist*. 4th February 1995)

'Is The Future Female?' (*Panorama*, BBC1. May 1995)

'Girls Doing Well While Boys Feel Neglected' (*The Guardian*. 26th August 1995)

'Perils Of Ignoring Our Lost Boys' (*The Times Educational Supplement*. 28th June 1996)

'The Sex Of Success' (Australia, *The Courier-Mail*. 13th January 1996)

'The Trouble With Men' (*The Economist*. 28th September 1996)

'Girls Outclassing Boys' (*The Guardian*. 26th November 1997)

'Time We Had Jobs For The Boys' (*The Daily Telegraph*. 5th January 1998)

'Grim Reading For Males' (*The Guardian*. 6th January 1998)

'What Nobody Ever Bothered To Ask About Boys' (*The International Herald Tribune*. 27th March 1998)

'Boys In Crisis' (*The Mirror*. 17th August 2000)

'Let's Hear It For The Boys' (*The Independent*. February 2000)

'How Exams Are Fixed In Favour Of Girls' (*The Spectator*. 20th January 2001)

'What Is It With Boys?' (*The Times Educational Supplement*. 15th November 2002)

'Boy Story' (*The Guardian*. 26th August 2003)

'Single-Sex Classes Get Boys Back To Work' (*The Sunday Telegraph*. 30th March 2003)

'Putting The Class Back In Our Boys' (*The Independent*. 27th November 2003)

'Gender Gap Here To Stay' (*The Times Educational Supplement*. 21st January 2005)

'Exam Results Reveal Gender Gulf In Schools' (*The Observer*. 15th May 2005)

'11-Year-Old Boys Fall Further Behind Girls In The Three Rs' (*The Guardian*. 1st November 2005)

Girls are now seen as having equality of opportunity and their educational performance has been reported as outstripping that of boys. Indeed, in 1995, Michael Barber, (at the time of writing, Director of the Standards and Effectiveness Unit) asked whether 'girls have had it too good for too long' (Barber 1995: 5). While in the early 1980s resources, research, policy and practice in education relating to equal opportunities was directed toward girls' education, the mid 1990s - early 2000s saw a shift, with resources, research, policy and practice relating to gender equity being focused on boys' achievement. Stephen Byers, the then School Standards Minister, announced at the 11th International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement in Manchester, January 2001, a new approach to 'tackling boys' achievement' in the form of legislation requiring each local education authority to make a commitment to raising boys' achievement as part of their Educational Development Plans (*BBC News Online*, 2001). Subsequently many LEAs appointed a team of Advisors specifically to support the raising of

boys' achievement². A number of government web sites have been set up specifically to support this work³. Intervention, and allocation of resources at government level to improve achievement of girls did not occur in the 1980s. Advisors for girls' education were only appointed in a minority of large, urban Labour Education Authorities. I have constructed Figure 1 to outline some of the key shifts in relation to gender issues in education, and indicate the chapter/s in which further discussion of the issue occurs.

Figure 1: Gender and education in the 1980s and 2000s.

	THEN – EARLY-MID 1980s⁴	NOW – EARLY-MID 2000s
Key concerns in education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Justice, equality and equal opportunities • Cross curricular projects and process driven curricular design, collaborative learning, group work, differentiated learning (chapter four) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achievement • Outcomes and topic driven curricula design, competition, testing, parental choice, streaming and specialist schools (chapter eight)
Some common discourses relating to gender and education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Girls lack access to equal opportunities • Schooling is sexist and disadvantages girls • Boys and male teachers are often sexist (chapter three) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Girls are high achievers and are not a problem • Boys are failing academically • Boys have problems • Multiple masculinities exist and need to be better understood • Different groups of boys have different problems - for themselves (multiple-masculinities position) (chapters one and seven)
Main focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Girls education • Anti-sexist work (Chapter Three) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boys' education • Boys' strategy (chapter five)
Theoretical framework/s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feminism (chapter four) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New essentialism • Social constructivism (chapter seven)
View of difference/similarity between girls and boys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Girls as a group are the same as one another (girls share similar characteristics, experiences and problems). Boys as a group are the same as one another • Boys and girls are different (the characteristics, experiences and problems of girls are different from those of boys) (chapter four) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boys are the same as one another (boys share similar characteristics, experiences and problems) and are different from girls. i.e. same view as in the early 1980s. • Boys are different from one another (groups of boys have different characteristics, experiences and problems from other groups of boys), but boys all have something in common that is different from what girls have in common (social constructivist discourse) (chapter seven).
Key 'players'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feminist teachers and researchers • Labour Education Authorities (chapter four) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The media • Male researchers/academics • New Labour government (chapters five, seven and eight)

² For example, www.devon.gov.uk/dcs/a/boys/index.html and

www.e-gfl.org/e-gfl/activities/intranet/teacher/other/boys/essex_approach.htm

³ For example, www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/casestudies/literacy/boys_achievement

www.schoolsweb.gov.uk/locate/curriculum/primary/keystage2/achievement/

⁴ This is not to suggest that this was the only discourse relating to boys and girls in education, but that it was a dominant discourse relating to equal opportunities/gender and education at the time.

This change of focus is curious. Some groups of girls are achieving good examination results, more girls go on to higher education, the numbers of women in employment have steadily increased over the last 50 years, and more middle class girls enter the professions and management. However, the patterns of study post-16 and in employment remain rigidly segregated along gender lines (see Appendix 2 for detailed information about boys and girls/men and women in education and employment); the average weekly income for women was still just over half that of men in 2002 - £145 as opposed to £287 (Smith, 2003) and women still report countless personal experiences of discrimination at work (Roberts, 2003⁵).

Additionally, research has challenged the observation that boys as a group are underachieving and has shown that some boys (particularly working class, and those of Caribbean, Pakistani and Bengali descent) have 'underachieved' at school for a long time, while boys from the middle class and from Indian and Chinese descent continue to perform well (Willis, 1977; Mac and Ghail, 1988; Epstein *et al*, 1998). Similarly not all girls are equally 'successful' at school (Teese *et al*, 1995, The Women's Unit, 2000), and the educational failure of working class girls continues to go unnoticed (Plummer, 2000) (see Appendix 2, pages 238-9 for data relating to achievement, ethnicity and social class).

Despite these class and ethnic differences in achievement between groups of girls, the overall higher achievement of girls compared with boys has been consistent over a long period:

In primary schools girls do better on average in most standardised tests of attainment. At the secondary school girls do better in school leaving examinations. In both GCE 'O' levels and CSE exams they obtain higher grades than their male peers (Blackstone, 1986: iii).

Pearson's (1983) historical study of hooliganism showed that the upper and middle classes have been worried about the 'threat' from working class, anti-school boys since at least 1680. Cohen (1998) writes that the Schools Enquiry Commission of 1868 found that girls commonly outperformed boys in reading, spelling, geography and history, and if entered for the same examination, in mathematics: 'From the late seventeenth century to the present – boys have always "underachieved" and more importantly, this underachievement has never been seriously addressed' (Cohen, 1998: 20). Such boys are a social and educational problem, but not a new phenomenon (Delamont, 2001). Boys' achievement at 11+ and in verbal reasoning (VR) tests has been consistently lower than girls. Several writers have pointed out that girls would have occupied two-thirds of the classrooms in grammar schools, were quotas not imposed (Weiner, 1985; Chitty,

⁵ Reported in a survey by the EOC 'Talking Equality', discrimination was seen as arising from 'natural differences' and women did not see it as an issue. Women regarded discrimination as a private problem with which they 'put up and shut up' (Roberts, 2003).

1989; Wilce, 1998). In 1954 the county paper for Huntingdon headlined 'Girls Brainier than Boys' and reported that the LEA had decided to limit the number of girls passing their 11+, resulting in some boys entering the grammar school who had not passed this examination (cited in Grant, 1994: 37). It was also recognised in the 1970s and 1980s that boys had more problems with reading than girls (Assessment of Performance Unit, 1983; Barrs and Pidgeon; 1986, ILEA Junior Survey, 1985b; Whitehead *et al*, 1977).

Evidence that boys have performed less well than girls in other English speaking countries is provided by these USA studies from the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s (all cited in Dugger, 1986):

- At age six when a boy enters first grade, he may be twelve months behind his female counterpart in development age. By nine this discrepancy may increase to 18 months (Bentzen, 1966)
- For every girl with academic problems in elementary school, there are four boys (Vroegh, 1976)
- In elementary remedial reading, boys outnumber girls two to one (Vroegh, 1976)
- In elementary school, two-thirds of all grade repeaters are boys (Peltier, 1968)
- Studies of 'gifted' children revealed that underachievement occurs twice as frequently among boys as among girls (Hartley, 1959).

As well as being long-standing, this is a worldwide phenomenon: in an Unesco study of 43 countries, girls outperformed boys on reading tests in all 43 countries, and in mathematics tests in eight of the countries (Woodward, 2003).

Given this evidence we might ask why boys' 'underachievement' was not identified as a problem until the 1990s. Because the discourse of boys' achievement is always relational, in other words, always in comparison to girls' achievement, the 'underachievement' of boys implies an underlying and unspoken problem, the 'overachievement' of girls. We need to ask also, therefore, "Why did girls' achievement become such a problem in the 1990s?" The evidence also suggests other questions, for example, " Why, if girls achieve better grades, do women earn less than men and not work in the most highly paid sectors of the economy?" or simply, "Are girls more clever than boys?"

The focus of this thesis

This thesis extends the discussion about gender and education by asking how and why the perception of a crisis in boys' 'achievement' and of girls' 'overachievement' has arisen, and contrasts this with perceptions about boys' problematic behaviour and learning in the early 1980s. I examine the social context for the shift in emphasis from young women to young men, and within which young men are seen as being 'the most important social problem of our time'.

This study began with the search for a poststructuralist research design. A number of diverse theoretical critiques are labelled poststructural, including those of Derrida and Lyotard. However, Foucault's notions of 'archaeology' (Foucault, 1972) and 'discourse' (Foucault, 1971, 1972) specifically inform this thesis. Following Foucault, I ask 'How is it that one particular statement (a social problem in this case) appeared rather than another?' (Foucault, 1972: 27) and 'What made it (a social problem) at the time it appeared?' (*Ibid*: 179). I intend to explore the process through which social problems are constructed *as* problems through the case of changing discourses relating to the 'problem of boys'. I am interested in examining the extent to which both the emergence of problems relating to boys 'underachievement' in the mid-1990s and of boys' 'sexist' behaviour in the early 1980s are troublesome for boys' and girls' education.

The aims of the research, developed from Scheurich's (1997) 'policy archaeology' (who in turn builds on Foucault, 1972), are as follows:

1. To study the changing construction of 'problems' relating to boys in school over a 24-year period – recognizing how the 'problems' are described, language used to describe them, and how they are explained and understood.
2. To study the social construction of solutions to the 'boy problem' – why are some solutions acceptable and others unacceptable?
3. To study the interconnected factors, and changing events that make it possible for the emergence of 'boys as a social problem' – what is the context within which this particular problem has been able to arise?
4. To study the purpose/social function of identifying boys as a problem, or as having problems.
5. To study the historical struggles between discourses relating to gender and education.
6. To contribute to developing a poststructuralist research method in educational enquiry, and to discussion about 'reality' and 'realism' in research.

These aims will be achieved through a discursive analysis of:

- ‘data’ from women teachers, collected 24 years ago as part of the action research project in WBS
- ‘data’ from schools across one LEA collected during action research as an Advisory Teacher for anti-sexist work with boys in the mid-1980s
- literature from the 1980s, including my own writing
- contemporary literature
- women teachers’ talk⁶ about boys in the 2000s.

I will show that work with boys in the early 1980s was driven by a feminist equal opportunities agenda, and is now driven by an agenda focused on achievement and ‘outcomes’. Women teachers in the earlier study, and feminist educational researchers in the early 1980s focused on concerns about boys ‘sexist’ behaviour, and feminist women teachers introduced interventions relating to changing boys. I plan to revisit this earlier research using a poststructuralist framework:

....as far as researchers are concerned there is never a point of *final* closure. There is always the possibility of going back to first principles, re-analysing the data, incorporating new evidence, applying different interpretative techniques – indeed the very concept of research presupposes such intellectual open-mindedness (Humes and Bryce, 2003: 182-3).

I will also return to boys’ schools to discover whether the way women teachers talk about and understand boys has changed in the early 2000s. I am interested to find out whether the solutions suggested by women teachers in the early 2000s bear any resemblance to those suggested in the 1980s, and how they relate to media and policy driven concerns. I plan to compare understandings of ‘masculinity’, the ‘problem’ of boys’ education, and ‘solutions’ in the 1980s and in the early 2000s. This comparison will help to illustrate how construction of social problems changes and is dependant on context.

This thesis adds to understanding about how certain events/objects in education become construed as ‘problems’ and to the critique of specific solutions offered to these ‘problems’. An enquiry into how a phenomenon comes to be identified as a social problem and whether this is ‘real’ also raises questions about the nature of research, and the extent to which research is concerned with the ‘real’ or ‘true’. I contribute to the problematising of conceptions of research as producing new ‘knowledge’ and offer a postmodern reading of ontological and

⁶ While I have used the word ‘data’ to refer to the information collected in the 1980s I plan to refer to ‘speech acts’ or simply ‘talk’ in reference to contemporary discourse. ‘Data’ signifies figures, facts, information and a modernist view of the research purpose.

methodological issues relating to realism and relativism. These issues are marginalised in much educational research.

Poststructuralist research could seem a contradiction, since research is generally concerned with uncovering 'reality' or 'truth', and poststructuralism is concerned with *questioning* notions of 'reality' and 'truth'. Additionally, research in education may be supposed to develop new knowledge that has practical application (Humes and Bryce, 2003). As is apparent in the next section, poststructuralism makes no such claims, and is critical of modernist conceptions of 'knowledge' production and 'solutions' (see pages 29-30). I am attempting to offer a contribution to 'thinking differently', both about research, and about boys with awareness that my understanding is partial and incomplete, and to disrupt conceptions of events and social practices relating to conceptions of boys' 'sexism' in the 1980s and 'underachievement' in school in the 2000s:

But, then, what is philosophy today – philosophical activity, I mean – if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not in the endeavour to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known (Foucault, 1985: 9).

Chapter Two: Methodology

Five years ago, when I began this current research, I was interested in developing and applying a poststructuralist research methodology to increase my understanding about the transformation in the view of boys that had occurred in education. As St. Pierre maintains, poststructural critique:

...can be employed to examine any commonplace situation, any ordinary event or process, in order to think differently about that occurrence – to open up what seems ‘natural’ to other possibilities (Adams St. Pierre, 2000: 479).

I was interested in examining what a poststructuralist research design in education may ‘look like’ and in using the case of boys and their education to illuminate this. My understanding of what a poststructuralist research methodology could entail is indebted to Foucault (1972) for his ‘archaeological’ metaphor and explanation of discourse, and to Scheurich (1997), (following Foucault) for his notion of ‘policy archaeology’. The research in the 1980s on boys and sexism was based in feminist critical action research. I continue, therefore, by clarifying my understanding of poststructuralism through an analysis of some of the similarities, differences and continuities between critical theory and poststructural theory (Figure 2) before making some comments on critical action research and proceeding to explore poststructuralism in more detail.

From Critical theory to poststructuralism

Figure 2 summarises my contribution to understanding key issues in research from the perspectives of critical theory (rooted in hermeneutics⁷) and poststructuralism. For example: How does each perspective view the role of society in shaping individual experience? How is power viewed? How is ‘truth’ or knowledge viewed? As will be evident from Figure 2, both critical theory and poststructuralism challenge the social order and inequality, and are concerned with issues relating to power. However, the factors determining human beliefs and behaviour, how power operates, and how the social order is itself produced, are understood differently. Crucially, these theoretical approaches derive from different philosophies about what is ‘true’ or ‘real’ and the nature of knowledge.

⁷ Hermeneutics, based on the work of Heidegger emphasises meaning derived from socio-historical and cultural practices, rather than the meaning-making subject of Husserl’s phenomenology (Moran, 2005). Hermeneutics is at the base of critical theory, and it accepts that there is a ‘deep or ultimate truth awaiting discovery’ (Smart, 1985: 16) through ‘interpretation of historically shifting contexts within which we are situated’.

Figure 2: Some similarities and differences between critical theory and poststructuralism.

	Critical theory	Poststructuralism
View of role of society in shaping experience - Both critical theory and poststructuralism are concerned with how experiences and practices are shaped by the social order.	Critical theorists see experiences and practices as shaped through ideologies taught by major institutions in society.	Poststructuralists see experiences and practices as shaped by beliefs, which are in turn determined through discourse. A nexus of complex and changing factors that together produce the social order produces discourse itself.
View of power - Both challenge the social order and are interested in ways in which power is distributed and operates.	Power resides in the dominant social order and dominant ideologies support the hierarchical power relationships in society.	Power is not located in a single group. It is multiple and fragmented and operates through discourse, since all knowledge available to us is produced by discourse.
View of truth	Critical theory (including critical action research and some feminist theory) takes a constructivist view of 'truth', underpinned by realism. While in positivism, what we see is what is there and we develop theories to explain it, from a critical theory perspective what we see is false, formed through prevalent ideology, and the purpose of research is to unpick the ideology and uncover 'real truth': what is 'really real'.	Post structuralism challenges the idea that through research we can discover the 'truth'. Because how we think is determined by available discourse, we cannot 'unpick' language and understanding to discover 'reality'.
View of human agency	Critical theory proposes that when the ideological constructions are unpicked, the 'real truth' will be uncovered, and human agency and reflexivity will allow us to act to make changes to the social order.	Poststructuralism rejects the humanist notion that people are capable of rational free will, self-awareness and reflexivity, and claims instead that human thinking and behaviour are limited to what available discourse makes possible.
View of researcher	The individual researcher is capable of thinking and seeing outside of the ideological constructions.	All ways of thinking and acting are determined by the prevalent discourse, including those of the researcher. We cannot act, question or produce research designs that are not part of the prevalent discourse.
Typical research questions	Critical theorists typically ask how inequalities operate in society, and what their effect and function is.	Poststructuralists typically ask what conditions allow certain questions to be asked in the first place, and why some questions are asked and not others.

The key differences outlined here may be further developed as follows:

- The critical world view derived from the belief that neither the positivist⁸ nor the interpretive world views went far enough in transforming individual learning, educational systems or societal norms (Melrose, 1996: 51). Critical theory *is an extension of* structuralist explanations of social relations which stress ways in which human agency is determined by predominant structures of society. Poststructuralism is also determinist, but stemmed from *a critical response to* structuralism.
- Critical theory acknowledges the importance of structures in controlling and limiting human action. However, rather than uncovering subjective ‘truths’, critical theorists see the purpose of their research as removing barriers to people’s freedom by exposing ideologies that shape them, thus collectively empowering people to change their social conditions (Webb, 1991: 36. Cited in Melrose, 1996: 52). Critical theorists are concerned with exposing real structures and presenting the ‘true’ reality and see their goal as:
 - ...removing false beliefs and ideas about society and social reality, perceives humans as creative and compassionate human beings and is critical of the power systems and inequality structures that dominate and oppress people in societies ((Sarantakos, 1998: 39).

Poststructuralism has no such aim.

- Critical theorists are not interested in what people do (as Symbolic Interactionists are⁹) or in discovering the essence of subjects and understanding them (as phenomenologists do¹⁰) or in the

⁸ Sociologists who believe that it is possible to gather data ‘scientifically’ and that those data are facts are objectivists (or positivists). Those who adopt the idea that different social groups have different understandings of the world are interpretivists, post-positivists or interactionists. For postmodernists ‘there is no objectivity, only human discourse’ (Delamont, 2001: 13).

⁹ Symbolic interactionism (SI)– ‘maintains social life is formed, maintained and changed by the basic meaning attached to it by interacting people who interact on the basis of meanings they assign to their social world; social life and objects become significant when they are assigned meanings. Social life is expressed through symbols. Language is the most important symbolic system (Sarantakos, 1998: 49). SI research is concerned with the structure, function and meaning of symbolic systems. Major procedures are exploration and inspection. Exploration offers clear understanding of research questions. Inspection is related to intensive and concentrated testing. Emphasis is placed on the object not the subject (i.e. the researched. SI is directed toward reconnaissance rather than interpretation).

¹⁰ Phenomenology – suggests actors are active creators of their world through interaction. Based on Husserl (Moran, 2005). Phenomenology is intent on discovering the essence of subjects and understanding them. It’s focus is the subject. Phenomenology unravels taken-for granted assumptions.

subjective meanings people assign to aspects of their world (as interpretivists do¹¹), but are interested in *why* people interpret issues the way they do, who facilitates such interpretations, and who benefits. Critical theorists see reality as produced by people in power who:

...manipulate, condition and brainwash others to perceive things and to interpret them the way they want them to: reality is constructed by the powerful to serve their needs. Beyond this, reality is not in a state of order but of conflict, tension and contradiction, resulting in a constantly changing world. Critical theorists also distinguish between appearance and reality: what 'appears to be' is not reality....appearance is based on illusion and distortion (Sarantakos, 1998:36).

- While interpretivists also accept that the 'real' truth is not out there to be discovered, they seek to uncover how individuals make their own 'truths':

Interpretative theorists believe that reality is not 'out there' but in the minds of people; reality is internally experienced, is socially constructed through interaction and interpreted through the actors, and is based on the definition people attach to it. Reality is not objective but subjective; reality is what people see it to be (*Ibid*: 36).

I previously described my work with boys in the 1980s as feminist critical action research: it was centred in both feminist critical theory and action research. Emancipatory, or critical action research, is based on the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory. Zuber-Skerritt (1996) writes that emancipatory action research:

...also aims at the participants' empowerment and self-confidence about their ability to create 'grounded theory' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) i.e. theory grounded in experience and practice (*Ibid*: 5).

Empowerment relates to the ability to make decisions and effect change. Winter (1996) contends that through action research we may change our viewpoint and change ourselves:

Through involvement in the action research process, we not only submit others' accounts to critique, but our own also. We note not only the contradiction in others' viewpoints, but also the contradictions and possibilities for change in our own viewpoints. We are not consultants, advising others how to change, nor unchanging catalysts of others' development. We are part of the situation undergoing change. We have no theoretical basis for exempting ourselves from the processes we set in motion. On the contrary, we want to change, because we want to learn. The only viewpoints we want to support are those, which have newly emerged in the course of our fieldwork; those we started out with, we wish to transcend (*Ibid*: 23).

¹¹ Interpretivists see reality as a set of subjective meanings. Although it accepts that there is an objective world, it is argued that it is experienced only through consciousness. People create this world through interaction and do not know that they do so.

Action research is concerned with evolving situations and change to practice, whereas both positivist and interpretive research explain and describe how things are now. In action research the researcher continually questions, reflects on experiences and understanding, and changes their perception of the situation being researched. It therefore stresses reflexivity. Somekh (1994) describes how action research can lead to increased complexity and more questions than answers. She indicates that, because of this, action research 'is subject to attack by those who value the modernist certainties of traditional research grounded in experimental design' (*Ibid*: 11). Action research uses the same techniques of data collection as the hermeneutic and interpretive traditions, including observation and interviews. Rather than specific 'findings' or 'outcomes', action research generates what Dreyfus (1981) and Elliott (1993: 66-70) call 'situational understanding'. An important part of this is specific insights that are used as the basis for action to bring about improvement in the situation being researched. Therefore critical action research is both theory generating and solution-focused.

Feminist critical action research in boys' schools in the early 1980s led to the accumulation of data and theories relating to boys' behaviour and learning, sexism, harassment, bullying, the structure and organisation of boys' schools, ethos, culture, racism, inequalities, women teachers, teaching role, classroom dynamics, teaching methods, male and female teachers' relationships, and action research itself. Had my action research twenty years ago been presented as a PhD thesis, it would have been concerned with identifying the 'real' nature of 'sexism' in boys' schools, and framed by a feminist perception that the main beneficiaries of sexism were particular groups of men. I saw my research then as a means to emancipate and empower women teachers and boys themselves and as contributing to knowledge about how sexism operates in schools. However, this thesis is concerned with analysing this earlier data discursively and asking what conditions allowed women teachers to ask the questions they did about sexism at the time, rather than with describing and explaining those findings. My position has shifted in this thesis from a feminist to a poststructuralist perspective. Figure 3 is an attempt to clarify some of the transformations in methodology and philosophy that I made in relation to the research paradigm. As elsewhere, I have chosen to present this comparison of research frameworks in a tabular form. Tabulation necessarily involves some simplification of complex issues. However, I have found it an invaluable heuristic process for illuminating and clarifying key epistemological and ontological understandings underlying my different approaches to research.

Figure 3. Methodological, Philosophical and theoretical frameworks for research with women teachers in the 1980s and early 2000s.

	Earl-Mid 1980s	Early-Mid 2000s
Research questions	- How does sexism operate in boys' schools?	- How are 'problems' relating to boys and solutions to these 'problems' socially constructed?
Questions for women teachers	- What are women teachers' experiences of teaching boys and of boys' schools?	- What are women teachers' experiences of teaching boys and of boys' schools?
Questions to guide analysis of 'data' from women teachers	- Is there any evidence of sexist behaviour, or of sexism in the institutional arrangements or practice in boys' schools?	- How do women talk about and understand their experience of teaching boys and of boys' schools? - Do women draw on the same (1980s discourses) or different discourses to explain their experiences? - Have perceptions of the issues, problems and solutions relating to teaching boys changed? -Is there any evidence that boys have changed?
Ontological position	Feminist realist – the 'truth' is out there and we are going to uncover it.	Nominalist - words act as symbols from which our beliefs are constructed. Beliefs in turn construct experiences.
Purpose of research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social theorising (arising from critical research) – 'the desire to comprehend and, in some case, transform (through praxis) the underlying orders of social life' (Morrow and Brown, 1994: 211) • To challenge gender domination – to 'correct both the invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal social position' (Lather, 1991: 7) • To change 'the way we do things'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •To contribute to creative, generative conversations about discourses available to both researchers and educators interested in gender and education •To change the way we think, rather than what we do.
Process of research – guided/framed by social science theory, or to generate new knowledge/theory	Research process to generate evidence on which to build new knowledge and theory.	Research process guided and framed by social science theory (poststructuralism).
Methodology	Critical feminist action research.	Poststructuralism.
Research methods	Questionnaire, observation.	Archaeology (Foucault, 1972) Policy Archaeology (Scheurich, 1997) Discourse Analysis (Foucault, 1971, 1972).

Some researchers from within the critical tradition argue that it supports a social constructivist position (Nielson, 1990, Lather, 1988: 570). From the latter position there is no such thing as an objectively neutral or disinterested perspective: everyone (including themselves) is located historically and socially, and this context necessarily influences the knowledge they produce. Knowledge, in short, is socially constructed (Nielson, 1990: 9). In the social constructivist view human nature is both determined *and* capable of rational free will, since ‘social objects are constructed through perception’ and ‘these perceptions are patterned by and through social forms’ (Armstrong, 1994: 22). (See social constructivist critique of sex role theory (pages 88 and 148) and account of masculinity (pages 148-156) for further clarification of social constructivism).

Poststructuralism

Poststructuralism, too, explores the ways in which ‘knowledge’ is framed within historically and socially specific contexts, but suggests (unlike critical theory) that the ‘real’ truth cannot be uncovered by research because all truths are historically and socially specific:

Any claim on the part of researchers to be in pursuit of truth, or to be in possession of knowledge, is treated by poststructuralists as hiding the work of other interests (Hammersley, 1995: 14-15).

From this perspective, the discovery of boys ‘sexism’ or institutional sexism in the 1980s was not the ‘real’ truth, any more than is the discovery of boys’ underachievement in the 1990s, but both are ‘truths’ that emerged within specific historical conjunctions. Scheurich (1997: 33) describes this as ‘the unabashed recognition that all epistemology, ontology, and the ways of thinking that yield such categories as epistemology and ontology are socially conditioned and historically relative or contextual’. However, unlike social constructivism, the aim of poststructuralism is to bring about the “death of the subject” (Jones, 1993) and to point to why the concept of the actor/agent/subject as the ‘source of meaning and the architect of a consciously created social reality’ should be discarded (*Ibid*: 106). In a poststructuralist view, reality is a product of how people think, which is itself limited by the language available to us. From a *structuralist* perspective thought and action are determined: from a Marxist perspective through economic organisation, from a Freudian perspective by the unconscious. Structuralism tends to explain human behaviour according to a ‘singular ultimate determinant’ (Smart, 1985: 16). From a *poststructuralist* perspective events are analysed according to multiple, interconnected processes and factors.

French structuralists (Levi Strauss, 1968; Saussure, 1959) emphasise the role of *language* in determining thought. Structuralist analysis of language identifies the *grammatical rules* that

allow certain statements to be made and predict other possible statements. Foucault, in contrast, is interested in the *historical conditions* that make certain statements possible (Freundlieb, 1994). In poststructuralism all ideas and concepts are social in origin, as ‘you must learn from others the language you use to describe your innermost thoughts and feelings’ (Doyal and Harris, 1986: 82). Thus, the ‘subject’ – the creative, interpreting and autonomous agent at the core of action theory (and the hub of philosophies like Existentialism) doesn’t exist (Jones, 1993). Tring (1985) suggests:

We can no longer be understood as subjects thinking about an independently existing world and devising language to describe it. We are not the source of language or of culture. Being human involves living in a world, which has already been determined (*Ibid*: 189-90).

Poststructuralism challenges the humanist belief that ‘language simply names and reflects what it encounters’ (Adams St. Pierre, 2000: 480). In humanism language is perceived as mirroring the world. Saussure (1959) wrote about language as a system of signs. In poststructuralism the meaning of signs is not intrinsic, but relational (Weedon, 1987: 13). In other words, we only understand the meaning of the sign because of its difference from other signs; ‘boy’ can only be understood in relation to difference from ‘girl’. Derrida (1974) developed this idea to argue that the meaning of language constantly shifts depending on the social context. Derrida employed a text analysis called deconstruction to look at ‘how a structure has been constructed, what holds it together, and what it produces’ (Adams St. Pierre, 2000: 482) and through doing so ‘see the text coming undone as a structure of concealment, revealing its self-transgression, its undecidability’ (Spivak, 1974: xxv):

Deconstruction is a reading strategy designed to interrogate the logic of binary oppositions that have dominated western intellectual traditions by seeking points of pressure where those oppositions erode. As a method, it involves identifying a series of polarized terms within a given text, then showing how they break down and collapse into one another. Since such dichotomies as man/woman, white/black, west/east are inevitably asymmetrical, deconstruction calls into question the hierarchies that privilege one term over another. By extension things look different from the margins, where two apparently opposed concepts may bifurcate into three, or an infinity of, possibilities (Adams and Savran, 2002: 337).

Rather than naming pre-existing things and ideas, a poststructural analysis views language as actually constructing them, and by doing so, the world as we know it. In other words:

We have constructed the world as it is through language and cultural practice, and we can also deconstruct and reconstruct it. There are many structures that simply do not exist prior to naming and are not essential or absolute but are created and maintained every day by people.... We cannot appeal to some absolute authority out there somewhere to justify “the way things are” (Adams St. Pierre, 2000: 483).

Poststructuralism demands that we examine our own complicity in the maintenance of social injustice rather than placing the blame elsewhere, outside our own daily activities (*Ibid*: 484).

One problem with the way language constructs what it encounters, is that because there are so many different things in the world, we use one word to group certain things into a particular category, for example, 'woman'. Many different people are slotted into this category. Adams St. Pierre (2000: 480) suggests that this results in a shaky category, and that in order for it to hold together, we attempt to define the *essence* of the category, the single unique factor, that enables one to identify someone as part of this category. This search for the essence is, she writes, the search for identity, and identity (being the same as) becomes more important than difference. The purpose of this search is to produce order out of chaos, confusion, randomness and accident. This raises the question, if individual subjects do not devise language, where does it come from? Foucault's answer to this question is that particular ways of talking and knowing about social life depend upon the *prior* existence of specific organisational and institutional arrangements (Jones, 1993). Scheurich (1997) calls these arrangements 'social orders'. He describes social orders as follows:

Social orders are historically shifting, complex, dispersed systems comprised of unities and differences, continuities and discontinuities. But since there are always, in complex systems, potential and incipient but marginalized and suppressed alternatives, there is a grid or network of social regularities, which produces and reproduces a dominant order (Scheurich, 1997: 115).

This thesis is an endeavor to identify some of the complex systems, the 'grid of social regularities' which produced specific ways of talking and knowing about boys and their education in the early 1980s. It is also an attempt to recognise the contemporary conditions that enable current statements about boys' 'underachievement' and 'solutions' to this perceived problem.

Archaeology, discourse and power

The thesis utilises Archaeology as a research method. Foucault (1989:45) said 'I first used the word (archaeology), in order to designate a form of analysis that wouldn't at all be a history (in the sense that one recounts the history of interventions or of ideas)'. Archaeology investigates:

The conditions necessary for the appearance of a(social problem), the historical conditions required if one is to 'say anything' about it, the conditions necessary if (the social problem) is to exist in relation to other objects...(Foucault, 1972: 44).

The purpose of archaeology is to study the history of statements (knowledge), to describe the 'system of rules and their transformations, which make different kinds of statements possible' (Davidson, 1986: 222). The archaeological metaphor is used by Foucault to emphasise unearthing the foundations of different discourses: he states his aim as 'the digging out of evidence about past discourses' (Jones, 1993: 107).

Foucault said 'specific ways of thinking and talking are forms of knowledge which work like language'; he calls such 'languages' *discourses* (Jones, 1993). Poststructuralist writers developed 'discourse' as an alternative model to 'ideology'¹² and through doing so 'challenged so-called "grand narratives" or major truth discourses, which they said had dominated modernist thought since the Enlightenment' (Star, 1999: 39-40). Foucault's poststructuralist method is concerned with questions about discourse. For example: 'How does discourse function? Where is it to be found? How does it get produced and regulated? What are its social effects? How does it exist?' (Bové, 1990: 54). Archaeology traces how discourses construct binaries, categories and classification schemes that supposedly order this world. These categories and binaries, based on essences, 'reward identity and punish difference' (Adams St. Pierre, 2000: 484). I am rewarded, and it is important, for me to identify as a woman, to be the same as other women. If I see myself as different from women, or like men, I will be punished. Foucault sees resistance to power as resistance to identity and challenges the idea that people have a fixed identity,

A discourse enables us to know about reality, and because we are compelled to know through discourses, they exercise power over us (Jones, 1993). Through discourse, we gain a sense of who we are and how we as individuals are related to the rest of society. For Foucault, therefore, the study of discourse is the study of power. Within *structuralism* there is a hierarchical view of the relationship of power: power is fixed, it is something that one 'has', and is lodged in a privileged group of people or locations. In contrast *poststructuralists* conceive power as a network of many unequal points or nodes that link various individuals and actors together in complex ways (Foucault, 1978). Power is exercised in actions and present in all social relationships. From this perspective power constantly shifts and is not a single organising principle, but is multiple, complex, shifting and fragmented (Grosz, 1990).

Another key Foucauldian idea is that power disciplines (Foucault, 1977, 1980). Disciplinary power is exercised through observing and measuring individuals, and making judgments about them. This kind of power is sustained independently of the person exercising it since those it controls believe themselves to be under surveillance, and hence impose self-discipline (Foucault, 1977). Disciplinary power is used by the modern State to control individuals through creating regimes of 'truth'. The school is one such disciplinary mechanism.

¹² I see ideology as 'imposed' and filtering down from above, and discourse arising from underpinning social orders and permeating up.

Foucault's archaeology examines the relation between truth and knowledge; his genealogy examines the relation between truth and power. Knowledge relates to what can be said. Power to who can say it (St. Pierre, 2000: 496). From a modernist perspective, knowledge is seen as separate from, or outside of power, but Foucault argued that knowledge and power are inter-dependent since:

... there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations (Foucault 1977: 27).

Foucault is interested in exclusion through discourse and knowledge (Foucault, 1980). He contests the idea that through knowledge we can understand the way power operates, and delimit or overthrow power (as proposed by critical theory) and suggests that instead power operates to produce 'notions of truth' (Beasley, 1999: 93). Poststructuralism 'insists not just on the relativity of all knowledge claims but also that knowledge is a product of desire or power' (Hammersley, 1995: 14-15).

Hegel, in the humanist tradition, proposed that knowledge equates with movement toward resolution and progress. In contrast, Foucault asserted that far from the knowledge produced by discourse enabling progress and liberation (the 'modernist' view), knowledge is used to oppress, control and coerce people. He argued that knowledge does not build on knowledge in a progression fashion, but rather:

...they simply appear alongside one another – catastrophically, as it were, without rhyme or reason. Thus the appearance of a new 'human science' does not represent a 'revolution' in thought or consciousness (White, 1978: 234).

This led him to observe that new discourses simply move into spaces left by other discourses, and to write that 'history has no meaning' (Foucault, 1980: 114).

Foucault's work on discourse (1972) provides the entry to a poststructural mode of analysis. Discourse analysis 'enables us to understand how what is said fits into a network that has its own history and conditions of existence' (Barrett, 1991:126). 'Even more important, the rules of discourse allow certain people to be subjects of statements and others to be objects. Who gets to speak? Who is spoken? Discourse can never be just linguistic since it organises a way of thinking into a way of acting in the world' (Adams St. Pierre, 2000: 485). Foucault describes discourse as 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972: 49). In other words discourse produces reality, rather than the other way around (if we know and understand the word 'sexism', we will experience certain behaviours as sexist). Rather than analysing social organisation (as in critical theory) we therefore analyse how people think. For example, rather than analysing the ways in which schools are sexist institutions, we will analyse the ways in which women talk about and understand sexism, and the social

conditions that made this way of talking and thinking possible. From this perspective, social problems are social constructions. This is not to imply that social problems do not exist or exist only in the perception of human agents (it will be apparent from the data in chapter three that many women really are touched on the breast, or shown pornographic pictures in schools), but that:

...how social problems are named, defined, and discussed is a social process and that social visibility of some 'problems' as social problems and the invisibility of other 'problems' as social problems...is also part of this process of social construction (Scheurich, 1997: 114).

The subject of this thesis, then, is not related to identifying individual or institutional behaviours, or developing explanations for behaviours. Nor is it concerned with how boys are socially constructed or with arguing that some discourses about boys are more dominant than others at certain times. Rather it is concerned with asking how and why specific discourses are possible and identifying the social processes that allow boys to be named as a social problem. Foucault was not concerned with what is true or not, but with how ideas about what is true are used and with what effects. From a poststructuralist perspective, the question becomes, 'How are ideas about male sexism used and what effects do they have?' or 'How are ideas about boys' underachievement used and what effect do these ideas have on boys, girls, their teachers or policy making?' Scott (1988: 35) asks 'How do meanings change? How have some meanings emerged as normative and others have been eclipsed and disappeared? What do these processes reveal about how power is constituted and operates?' For Foucault discursive practices are the root of social life (Jones, 1993). Foucault's main task was to work out how different discourses came to be established when they did, in order to discover why people think as they do, say what they say, and do what they do: to discover why and how a particular discourse is established and prevails at a particular time in history. *From a poststructuralist archaeological perspective, it is not the description of an experience or phenomenon that is important, nor is it the analysis of the discourse.* What matters most is understanding the *context* within which a particular discourse develops:

...what becomes interesting for researchers who take up these (poststructuralist) sources of investigation is to investigate the conditions for both the creation and manifestation of phenomenon. Such structures cannot be studied unmediated, neither in their shape of sociocultural and historically sited practices and discourses nor in the shape of material or bodily processing (Sondergaard, 2002: 189).

The poststructuralist view of truth

I have developed the typology in Figure 4 to clarify my understanding of the poststructuralist view of truth and the purpose of research by comparing poststructuralism with other major paradigms.

The typology is based on two fundamental dimensions of research:

- the ontological axis relates to the view of truth underpinning the research approach and has a realist view of truth at one end, and a nominalist¹³ at the other. In positivism there is a belief that we can actually know what things '*are*', therefore positivist research is concerned with discovering what *is*. In interpretative, or post-positive theory, all knowledge is seen as relative to the human mind; we can know only the affect something has on us, not what the thing itself is. Therefore interpretative, or post-positivist research is concerned with discovering how individuals perceive things. Poststructuralism moves beyond truth as relative, to a notion that there are no universals either in our minds, or external world, but that words act as symbols from which our beliefs are constructed. Thus 'truth' is not discovered through the research, but instead research identifies our ideas about things and where they came from.
- the other axis relates to why the research is conducted and has for the purpose of explaining at one end of the axis, and to bring about change at the other. A poststructuralist perspective is concerned with change in perspective, with change to the way we think, whereas critical theory is concerned with change to either practice, people, policy or society. In comparison interpretivist and positivist research are both for the purpose of explaining phenomenon.

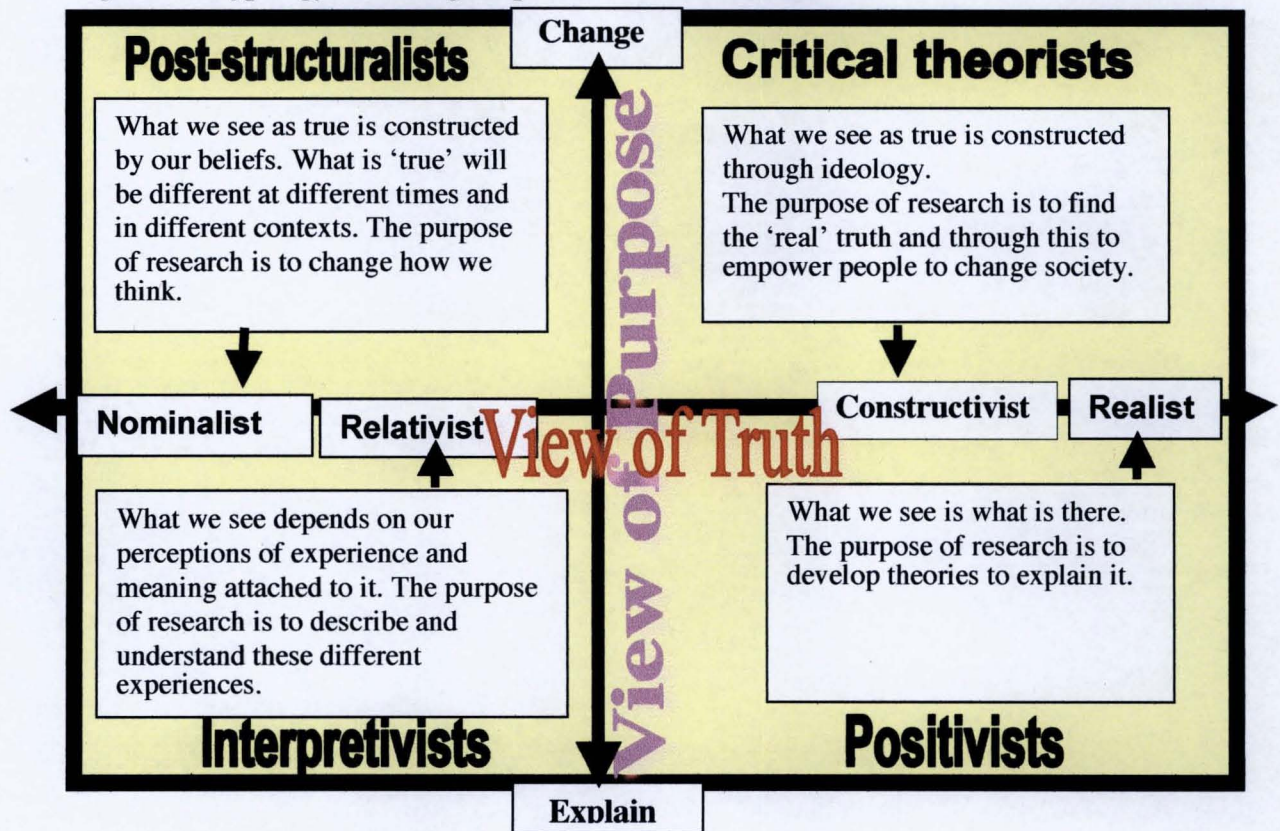
Pring (2000: 110) elucidates the conventional approach to educational research as including:

- the idea that there is a complete and scientific explanation for physical and social reality
- the development of separate intellectual disciplines
- the idea that these 'bodies of knowledge' can provide a secure knowledge base for social action and improvement
- a commitment to the 'grand narrative' of social progress involving connections between application of reason, the production of research evidence, and the capacity of research to bring about solutions to social problems
- a view of education as initiation into these different forms of 'knowledge' and rationality, and of teachers as 'experts'.

Poststructuralists offer a fundamental critique of this conventional approach to knowledge construction by both positivists and post-positivists (interpretivists and critical theorists).

¹³ I have struggled to find language to describe the poststructuralist view of truth. Scheurich (1997) calls it 'relative'. However, Rawlinson (1997) also describes post-positivist research as relative. As indicated in Figure 4, critical theorists view truth as being constructed, but through the process of research the real research is 'uncovered' and therefore a realist view of truth is the underpinning ontological position.

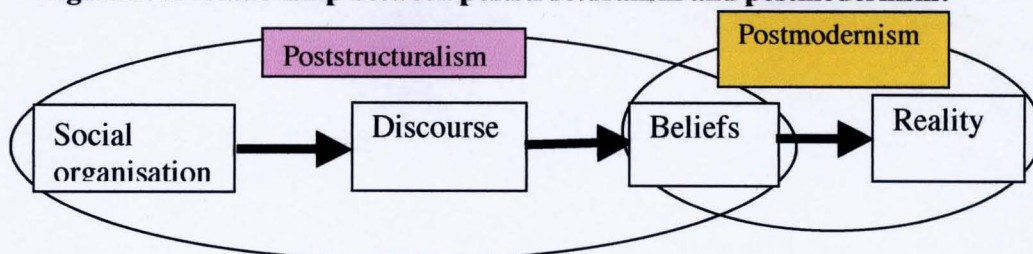
Figure 4. A typology of ontological positions within research



Poststructuralism and postmodernism

This thesis is written from a poststructuralist, rather than a postmodernist theoretical perspective, although there are similarities and overlap between the two, they are not the same. I attempt to demonstrate a distinction between poststructuralism and postmodernism in Figure 5 below. I recognise that this oversimplifies complex and multifaceted ideas. Adams St. Pierre (2000: 485) argues that: 'The point is that poststructuralism is not concerned with asking essentialising questions about the "meaning" of anything, including discourse, since meaning can never be found...'. This endeavour has nevertheless helped my understanding of issues that might properly be the concern of poststructuralists and those that might more broadly be considered within the realm of the postmodern theorist, and has led me to suggest that, while postmodernism *is* concerned with fluidity, mutability, and uncertainty; poststructuralism is rather more unambiguous and boundaried, because essentially concerned with *explaining* social organisation.

Figure 5: A relationship between poststructuralism and postmodernism?



In my understanding issues of reality and truth figure largely in postmodernist theory, while the focus in poststructuralism is more with the role of language in determining thought and belief, and the contexts or social regularities that make specific discourses possible. While poststructuralism may be described as a postmodern outlook on the world, postmodernism cannot be described as poststructuralist. Poststructuralism and postmodernism have developed from separate critiques of two of sociologies most influential traditions – the former of structuralism, and the latter of modernism, particularly its stress on dualism, the scientific method, certainty and the possibility of human progress (Peters, 1999). Whether in the arts¹⁴ or social sciences, postmodernism rejects the tenets of modernism: it rejects the doctrines of supremacy of reason, the notion of truth, the belief that people can become perfect and the idea that we can create a perfect society. Postmodernism tries to avoid the modernist project to classify, bound, confine, and polarise concepts into oppositional dualities, and instead emphasises uncertainty, insecurity, doubt and ambiguity. Andrew Rawlinson wrote to *The Times Literary Supplement* after a number of previous correspondents asked what the term ‘postmodern’ meant, and told a story about baseball:

¹⁴ Postmodernism is a widely used theoretical concept both in the arts and social sciences. The term appears to have been first used in architecture. Postmodernists in architecture rejected the modernist, avant garde, passion for the new in the 1950s and 60’s and wanted to maintain elements of modern utility while drawing on the classical forms of the past: ‘In the latter half of the 20th century there has been mounting evidence of the failure of the Modernist enterprise. Post- modernism is riddled with doubt about the continued viability of the notion of progress’ (www.jefferson.village.virginia.edu/elab/hf10242.html). These doubts arose partly as a result of the Second World War in which millions of people died – largely as a result of modernist ‘progress’. Before the Second World War the Surrealists ‘clung to the modernist belief that their art could influence human destiny, that they could change the world...Having rejected the past many years ago, and now with the future no longer the goal of artistic effort, many artists turned with visible distress to the present and focused their attention on contemporary popular culture’ (Witcombe, 2002). Attention also turned toward manipulation of materials and the process of making was given more importance than the result. In art postmodernism has come to be identified with an emphasis on ‘anarchic collective, anonymous experience...most importantly. the dissolution of distinctions, the merging of subject and object, self and other, and an anarchist rejection of all attempts to define, reify or re-present the human subject’ (www.jefferson.village.virginia.edu/elab/hf10242.html). Postmodernism is concerned with process and ‘becoming’ (Witcombe, 2002). A ‘non-linear, time-fractured mode of viewing the world is distinctly postmodern’ (www.pixcentrix.co.uk/pomo). The viewer, is more than an observer, but instead is invited to participate in some way. Instead of a linear or realist approach, postmodernism may stress gaps and discontinuities

¹⁵ My full time post was jointly funded by the EOC and ILEA. CRs part-time post was also funded by the EOC

Three umpires are discussing how they do their job. The first, who is also the least experienced, says, "I call 'em as they are". The second, who has been in the game, a little longer, says, "I call 'em as I see 'em". The third and most experienced says, "They're nothing till I call 'em". These three could be characterized as objectivism, relativism and postmodernism respectively (Rawlinson, 1997: 17).

I view postmodernism and poststructuralism as congruent with one another and forming a chain of ideas, as I endeavor to show above. However, I have identified some tensions between poststructuralism and postmodernism, and these are raised in Chapter Ten, 'Reflections on the Research'.

Methods

Both positivist and post-positivist research are rooted in modernist discourse. The conventions of writing a thesis demand, to a degree, that the 'rules' of modernist research are followed. However, I circumvent these rules to some extent: for example, I do not have a chapter presenting the supportive literature and research, nor do I consign my research methods to an empirical research design. I do not present my 'results' or 'findings' in a chapter, followed by my analysis. I do not make claims to the production of 'grand theory' as an outcome of my research, and neither am I testing a hypothesis. My research design is principally poststructuralist, rather than postmodernist, and because of this I am not primarily concerned with fluidity, uncertainty, insecurity, doubt or ambiguity.

Instead, I am attempting to develop a poststructuralist research method: policy archaeology (the necessary conditions for the construction and emergence of a social problem as such) (Scheurich, 1997). Rather than analysing the ways in which boys are socially constructed (as in constructivism) or ways in which social organisation produces gender (as in critical theory), I use poststructuralism as a framework to analyse discursively the changes to how we think about and understand boys as a social problem and the 'social regularities' that made this way of thinking possible. My 'method' relates to the whole of my thesis, including the literature, and to my own previous ways of thinking about boys.

I have adapted Scheurich's (1997: 97) arenas of policy archaeology as the overall framework for the thesis and discourse analysis (analysing how we talk about and understand phenomenon) as an integral method. Policy archaeology involves study of the:

1. changing construction of 'problems' relating to boys in school – recognizing how the 'problems' are described, language used to describe them, and how they are explained and understood.
2. social construction of solutions to the 'boy problem' – why are some solutions acceptable and others unacceptable?
3. interconnected factors, and changing events that make it possible for the emergence of 'boys as a social problem' – what is the context within which this particular problem has been able to arise?
4. purpose/social function of identifying boys as a problem, or as having problems.
5. historical struggles that occur among and between discourses relating to gender and education.

Below I indicate the methods used to study each arena of policy archaeology. Arenas 1 and 2 involve the same research method, discursive analysis, and are therefore linked together.

- 1. Study of the changing construction of ‘problems’ relating to boys in school, and**
- 2. Study of the social construction of solutions to the ‘boy problem’ – why are some solutions acceptable and others unacceptable?**

Study of the changing construction of ‘problems’ relating to boys in school will begin with discursive analysis of one way in which boys were talked about, and understood in the early 1980s. It is not suggested here that this was the only, or even main, discourse about boys at this time. However, it was the only published discourse to identify boys in school as a ‘problem’ and to be explicit about ‘masculinity’ as the issue. It therefore begs the question of why this specific way of thinking and talking was possible at this time. Study of this discourse about boys in the 1980s will involve discursive interrogation of my own and others’ writing about boys, and ‘data’ collected during action research between 1982-86.

As previously stated, between 1982-1984 I taught and developed an anti-sexist course for boys (SfL) in WBS. An external project worker, CR¹⁵, was appointed for one and a half days a week to jointly evaluate the work. (Further information about the school, and the setting up of SfL is in Appendix 3). In this role I taught SfL to all eight first year classes, and subsequently to the second year (years 7 and 8). Together with CR, I devised a curriculum and curriculum resources, documented observations about the course and wrote reports to feedback issues to the SfL working party.

In my Advisory Teacher role between 1984-86, I organised In-Service Education for Teachers (INSET), attended by over 100 teachers from schools in the LEA. In the main, these were women teachers from the 10 non-denominational boys’ schools in the Authority. During the two years I was seconded I visited individual women and women’s groups in boys’ schools in the LEA. I collected ‘data’ from women on the courses and in schools about their experiences of working in boys’ schools. I made brief notes in the workshops, observed women teaching in boys’ schools and asked 30 women who attended two of the workshops to complete a questionnaire.

I now plan to interview women teachers in boys’ schools in the same LEA as previously about their experiences of teaching boys and working in boys’ schools in order to compare discourses relating to boys as a ‘problem’ in the 1980s and the 2000s. Discursive analysis, involves exploring what is said, what is not said, and what cannot be said (Ninnes and Burnett, 2003: 282). It involves asking, for example, ‘What is included and what excluded when the category

‘man’ is spoken?’ (Sondergaard, 2002: 189). Discursive analysis is used to investigate empirical material and enables us to question how sex/gender is constituted (*Ibid*: 189).

Evidence for how the ‘problems’ were described in the 1980s, language used to describe them, how they were explained and understood, and how solutions to the ‘problems’ were constructed will be sought through discursive analysis of:

- Reports and books written in the 1980s that present our experiences and analyses of work with boys, including extracts from the report 'Anti-Sexist work with boys' (Askew and Ross, 1984)¹⁶, extracts from a book, 'Boys' Don't Cry' (Askew and Ross, 1988a); extracts from a chapter, 'Combating Inequality-Combating an isolated approach' (Askew and Ross, 1991)
- Observations of SfL lessons in WBS. These observations were carried out for one day a week over two years by CR and were written up at the time by her
- Questionnaires completed in 1985 by 30 women teachers from 10 LEA schools (see Appendix 4)
- Other research and literature about boys and their schooling. Research specifically focusing on boys in school at this time was limited. Therefore, I will draw on feminist educational scholarship produced in the 1980s, which although explicitly concerned with the educational needs of girls, highlighted concerns about boys.

Interrogation of contemporary discourse about boys and construction of contemporary solutions, involves discursive analysis of:

- Interviews with 16 women teaching in four boys' schools in 2003
- Policy documents produced by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and LEAs
- Articles published in the media from the mid-1990s
- Contemporary research and literature about boys and their schooling.

Much of the earlier material is my own research data, collected while conducting action research into the ‘problem’ of boys in the early to mid-1980s, and analysed, in terms of *content*, at that time. I now return to this data to make both the discourse and my own metanarrative explicit, and am reminded by Rust (1991: 625) that poststructuralist ways of thinking may be useful in identifying the effect of our own metanarratives on our analysis. I seek to distance myself from my earlier position by referring to analysis from the 1980s as work by ‘Askew and Ross’. I hope this will facilitate me in distancing from the earlier *content* analysis and in treating

¹⁶ Produced in the second year of the project, funded by the E.O.C. and subsequently published and distributed.

my work as a *text of its time*. Earlier analysis is itself treated as further ‘data’, rather than as my current thesis.

Sondergaard (2002) points out that material ‘saturated’ with descriptions of actions and practices is an excellent source of information about how we construct categories relating to self and others:

If we seek access to the process whereby categories are constituted, we can use many types of material...but the most obvious is probably material of a kind that is saturated with descriptions of how life is lived. That is, material that contains descriptions of sequences of actions, human practices, reflection and interpretations and practicing of expressions and statements. In other words, material that is full of people’s understanding of themselves and of each other (*Ibid*: 190-1).

The research data I collected *are* saturated with descriptions of how boys behave, and interpretations of this behaviour, and full of my and others’ understanding of themselves and each other. The method developed for discursive analysis involves the following steps:

1. Reading and rereading the data and literature listed above
2. Identifying common ways of talking about and understanding boys and their schooling across all the material in the 1980s
3. Analysing the *content* of the interviews with women teachers in 2003, in relation to discourses identified in (2) above
4. Developing frameworks for analysing the *content* of literature and media accounts of boys and their achievements since the mid-1990s
5. Going beyond content analysis to make explicit what is said, not said, and cannot be said, attempting to question what was (in the 1980s) or is now, obvious or taken for granted; highlighting binary descriptions and their role in creating identity through construction of boys/girls and men/women as different from each other.

I am indebted to Sondergaard’s (2002) suggestion that the point of discursive analysis is to ‘contradict the obvious, to think against the stream of what is taken for granted...To make the process of constitution explicit, and attempt to destabilize what is taken for granted’ (*Ibid*: 191).

3. Study of the interconnected factors, and changing events that make it possible for the emergence of ‘boys as a social problem’.

Scheurich (1997: 98) reminds me that the focus of policy archaeology is the intersection of ‘conditions, assumptions, forces which make the emergence of a social problem’ possible, and

that these conditions are not created intentionally by any particular group or individual, although this does not mean that particular groups of people do not benefit from them.

One of my goals in writing this thesis is to question the ways boys have been problematised. Foucault (1972:25) writes that we need to disturb 'the tranquility with which we accept social problems'. In the words of Scheurich (1997: 97) 'By what process does a social problem gain the 'gaze' of the state, of the society, and, thus, emerge from a kind of social invisibility into visibility?' I am interested here in identifying the *processes* involved, rather than the *history* of the emergence of 'boys as a social problem'. A social problem:

Does not wait in limbo the order that will free it and enable it to become embodied in a visible and prolix objectivity; it does not pre-exist itself, held back by some obstacle at the first edge of light. It (a social problem) exists under the positive conditions of a complex group of relations (Foucault, 1972: 45).

In this analysis, 'boys as a social problem' (whether as 'sexist' or 'underachieving') could only (and indeed, *must*) emerge under certain conditions. This is *not* to say that the problem already existed and certain conditions were needed in order to be able to identify the problem. Rather, it is to argue that the problem could only be constructed *as* a problem at a particular time, when a particular 'complex group of relations' come together. This aspect of the study involves trying to identify and describe what the complex group of relations might have been in the early 1980s when boys' 'sexism' was viewed as a problem, and what they might be in the 2000s when boys' 'underachievement' is viewed as a social problem. This involves an analysis of how some major changes in the social order affected discourses about boys. For example changes to:

- economic organisation, from manufacture to service industries, and from national to global economy
- social values, from equal access and social justice and back to meritocracy
- organisation of schooling, from common experiences in comprehensives to differentiation and specialisation, from LEA supervision to Local Management of Schools (LMS) and competition
- sociological understanding, from feminism to postmodernism and poststructuralism
- educational values, from emphasis on progressive ideology to achievement and outcomes.

4. Study of the purpose/social function of identifying boys as a problem, or as having problems.

Study of the purpose of identifying boys as a problem or as having problems involves asking, in the words of Scheurich (1997: 108) 'Why has this problem-solution axis emerged and been accepted so rapidly and widely?' From a poststructuralist perspective this is a particularly interesting question: the social order would not normally label, describe, study or treat boys as a

problem, since this would be at odds with the established hierarchy of male supremacy. So we need to identify what is going on. We need to explore whether the contemporary construction of 'boys' achievement as a social problem' by the media, academics, policy analysts, journal, articles and books, hides the construction of an entirely different social problem, for example the (under)achievement of working class children? The (under)achievement of Black Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshi children? The (over)achievement of girls? Study of the purpose of identifying a 'boy problem' will involve examining literature on gender and education for other author's explanations of this phenomenon, as well as suggestions arising from analysis of the social context within which this is occurring.

5. Study of the historical struggles that occur among and between knowledges, discourses and practices relating to gender and education.

This aspect of the study will investigate whether prevalent discourses and practices relating to boys are compatible and consistent. If different discourses are found to exist at the same time, it will seek to highlight tensions between them. It will also involve asking how discourses about boys 'fit' with contemporary discourses about education and wider social processes.

Part One: The 1980s – ‘Problem Boys’: Study of the social construction of ‘boys’ sexism’ and ‘sexist boys’ schools’, the social construction of solutions to the perceived ‘problems’, and the factors that made it possible for the emergence of these discourses.

Chapter three examines the discourse of boys’ sexism, and the ‘solution’: anti-sexist work with boys in the early to mid-1980s. This discourse, while not dominant, was a discourse that highlighted boys as a problem at this time.

Chapter four outlines some of the ‘social regularities’ that made this, and the larger feminist discourse, possible then.

Chapter Three: The social construction of ‘problems’ relating to boys and of the solutions to the ‘boy problem’ in the early to mid-1980s.

This chapter analyses how women teachers involved in the action research, and feminist academics talked about, understood and constructed the problem of boys, the solutions to the ‘problem’ and their schooling in the early to mid-1980s.

3.1 Study of the construction of ‘problems’ relating to boys in school in the early-mid 1980s.

Discourse analysis results in identification of the following prevailing ways that boys and their schooling were talked about and understood by women teachers taking part in the action research, and feminist academics in the 1980s:

a. ‘Boys are sexist’

- ‘Boys behave aggressively to one another’
- ‘Boys take up too much space’
- ‘Boys harass girls and women in school’

b. ‘Sexism affects boys’ learning and achievement’

- ‘Boys are competitive and have few group work skills’
- ‘Boys prefer ‘doing’ to talking’

c. ‘Schools are sexist’

- ‘The school ethos is masculine’
- ‘There is less emphasis on relationships and more on control’
- ‘Male teachers are sexist’

a. 'Boys are sexist'

'Boys behave aggressively to one another'

Women teachers involved in the action research in boys' schools in the 1980s frequently commented on relationships between boys, particularly their aggressive behaviour. Twenty-two of the thirty teachers who completed questionnaires had previously worked in co-educational or girls' schools. They compared the boys' behaviour in the different schools. For example:

I'm sure the boys are more aggressive toward one another than they were in my last school. Of course, there were fights, but I didn't notice the boys continual 'messaging' with each other. They can't leave each other alone. All the time they poke one another, kick one another, write on one another's work, crumple work up which belongs to someone else - it's just a way of life. (questionnaire)

It is immediately striking that this teacher and other women teachers in the research, talked about boys as an undifferentiated social group. It is implied that all the boys behave in these ways. The boys who do not 'mess' with each other, poke one another, kick one another or generally interfere with others' work, are not the focus. My role was to support women teachers, and develop anti-sexist initiatives. This fact itself must have focused attention on boys' 'problem' behaviour, rather than their 'acceptable' behaviour.

In WBS the boys' relationships were seen as problematic in SfL lessons because they often interfered with work and because the interaction between boys was seen as a gender issue itself. Incidents recorded by CR included talk and behaviour that was described as:

- aggressive ("I'll bash his head in")
- homophobic ("batty boy") (bottom boy)
- 'put down' responses to each other in discussions, involving competitive attitudes ("You stupid idiot")
- blaming ("you always fuck up")
- sexist ("you cunt", "you girl") (Observer's Reports, October, November and February 1982).

Language used by boys was defined as 'sexist' because it was perceived as denigrating females. Girls, too, use this language with one another, but it may not be described as sexist. Below are two, out of many scenarios recorded in the SfL lessons:

John, Paul and Daniel are working together on an activity on friendship. This activity appears to be progressing well until John accidentally knocks some of the cards they have sorted onto the floor.
Paul: What'dya do that for you wanker?
John: Shut yer fuckin mouth
Paul: You cunt
John loses his temper and thumps Paul on the arm. Paul stands and kicks him back. (Observer's Report, November 1982)

Colin gets up and goes over to another table. He takes Mark's ruler without asking and goes back to his table. Mark goes to grab back the ruler. "Fuckin Wanker" shouts Colin. Mark goes back to his desk without answering. Colin follows him and pokes him in the back. Mark turns round. Colin goes up very close and holds his arms rigid by his side, clenches his fists and sticks his chest out. Mark mirrors this stance. The two boys stand there with chests almost touching, glaring into each other's faces, not speaking. (Observer's Report, March 1983)

It seems useful to highlight at this point that this thesis is not concerned with describing or pointing out these behaviours. Clearly they took place and were unacceptable. *From a poststructuralist position, what is important is how teachers talked about and understood these behaviours at the time:*

In many classrooms of eleven- and twelve-year-old boys there was continual competitive interaction among many of the boys... Boys seemed to be constantly attempting to impress each other through various antics in the classroom (which might involve provocative behaviour or rudeness towards the teacher) or generally 'winding' each other up, resulting in physical violence from time to time... There was considerable non-verbal, aggressive or physical communication among boys. 'Body language', such as stance or tone of voice, played a large part in interaction. Physicality was not only used as a means of intimidation between the boys, but also as a way of making social contact. It was not unusual to see a boy, walking past another, reach out and deliver a little 'punch' as a way of saying 'hello'. Conflicts, such as whose turn it was to use some materials, or how to go about a joint task, would often be expressed and decided in physical terms (for example, by a 'push' and 'shove') (Askew and Ross, 1988a: 34-36).

It is striking that the authors distance themselves from boys through seeing them as 'other'. Boys are competitive, provocative, rude, violent, aggressive, physical, intimidating, involved in conflict. Understanding male aggression as a social construct is lacking (see page 44). By implication these boys are unlikeable. Their behaviour is understood as 'masculine' and is different from 'feminine' behaviour. Seventeen teachers identified this 'problem' behaviour as 'bullying' and argued that bullying was one way of gaining status in the school:

Bullying seems to be one way in which status can be achieved when it's difficult to get it by other means. For example one boy in my form has some difficulties... I have heard boys speak of him with respect as "the best bully". (questionnaire)

'Bullying' was perceived as being more overt in boys' schools and as synonymous with being 'tough'. Mahoney (1985) argued that in mixed schools masculinity was proved through dominating girls. She argued that in boys' schools masculinity had to be proved in another way, usually in terms of physical strength. In boy-only groups it was noted that a boy appeared to take on a girl's role – an observation also made by Spender:

It seems to me that the boys create an inferior or outside group and level the abuse at them that they would otherwise direct at girls. The least 'manly' boys become the target and are used as substitute girls in a way ... (Spender, 1982: 121).

It was remarked in 1988:

Bullying is a major way in which boys are able to demonstrate their manliness.... The need to confirm aspects of masculinity which involve competitive definitions of strength and power (perhaps especially exacerbated in the strong male ethos of the boys' schools) must be recognised as an element involved in attempts to explain the extent of violence by boys in school (Askew and Ross, 1988a: 38).

The language the authors use is unambiguous. 'Bullying is a major way in which boys are able to demonstrate their manliness'. The purpose of bullying is to maintain 'masculine' identity. They understand boys as constantly engaged in hierarchical contests of superiority and inferiority, and believe boys see girls as inferior.

At the time it appeared that conflicts, involving harassment of one form or another, were so pervasive in boys' schools that they were the 'norm' rather than the exception. Walker (1988) suggested that for adolescent boys, aggression was a feature of their lives, and related to anxiety about identity. He perceived this to be addressed by some through strong boundary maintenance, group identification, and expressed through hostility to difference of any sort:

The aggression equally concerned females who did not keep what was considered to be their place. Any unorthodox behaviour, male or female, or even the likelihood of it would constitute grounds for a pre-emptive physical strike (*Ibid*: 99).

Underlying this writing is the explanation that boys *need* an 'inferior' reference group in order to confirm their masculinity. Girls are understood as providing the standard against which masculinity can be measured and evaluated. While noted in evidence that boys from all ethnic groups and social classes behaved in similarly aggressive ways, what is not talked about is how class and ethnic identities might interconnect with masculine identity and affect what was perceived as status seeking behaviour. Nor was explored how boys themselves perceived their behaviour and its effect on them.

Askew and Ross (1988a) wrote about boys' aggressive and bullying behaviour as if it were ahistorical. A search of educational research and literature shows that 'bullying' was not explicitly written about in school before the 1980s. Although behaviour that we would now call 'bullying' clearly occurred in schools prior to the 1980s this was described, rather than problematised. It was not labelled as 'bullying'; it was 'normal' male behaviour. The first book specifically focusing on bullying in school was published in the UK as late as 1978, and reported on 'mobbing' in Norwegian schools (Olweus, 1978). From the early 1980s interest in bullying in schools was widespread as evidenced from both the number of books published with 'bullying' in the title, and media interest. From a poststructuralist perspective I wonder why bullying came to be identified as a social problem at this time, and what social conditions allowed this behaviour to be named as 'bullying'. The links between aggression/violence and masculinity

have also been explained as a social and historical construct. For example, berg (1999: 73) explores how violence became linked to rationality, bureaucracy and masculinity in the 19th century when violence was separated from political power, mass armies were institutionalized, an 'officer corps' was established to run them, and violence was linked to rationality through the development of military science.

Talking in dualist ways about boys and girls results in our looking at what boys have in common, that is different from what girls have in common. It entails identifying the *essence of* 'boys', the single unique factor that enables us to identify a young person as part of this category (Adams St. Pierre, 2000: 480). The search for the essence, writes St. Pierre, is the search for identity, and identity becomes more important than difference. Discovering difference means that we can deny aspects of ourselves that may be competitive, angry or involve power struggles, and project these parts onto others. Most strikingly, what is missing in the discourse at this time is evidence of boys being kind, gentle, good friends, empathetic. Boys are mean and nasty. Askew and Ross (1984) wrote:

Alongside the general aggressive display to one another most of the boys we observed demonstrated a general lack of trust and support towards each other. This often made it impossible to discuss the issues raised in any personalised or meaningful way. The extent to which this appeared to operate again led us to think that the manner in which boys relate to each other is a primary sexist issue in itself (Askew and Ross, 1984: 5).

This seeming lack of trust and support between boys was in turn identified as a 'sexist issue'. This raises the question of how sexism was defined. It seems to encompass all behaviour that was believed to be 'other', not female behaviour, whether directed at girls/women from boys/men or between boys. Analysis of material from the 1980s indicates the prevalence of talk about 'sexism' and 'sexist behaviour'. Like 'bullying', 'sexism' and 'sexist' are words that were not in use in common use prior to the mid 1970s. The word 'sexism' itself is based on the assumption that people fit into two categories – men and women. Postmodern feminist writers question this assumption and suggest that sex itself is gendered; more than two categories exist (see page 160).

Feminists working in the civil rights movement in the USA coined the term *sexism* in the 1960s (Bird, 2005). Bird (*ibid*) writes that the resonance between the words "sexism" and "sexist," and the common words "racism" and "racist," occurred to a number of feminists at about the same time. She traces its first usage to a speech by Pauline Leet in 1965, then lecturer at Franklin and Marshall College, who charged that historians had been sexist in ignoring women poets, just as historians had been racist in ignoring the contribution of black people.

Analysis of women teachers' talk in the 2000s fails to find the label 'sexist' attached to boys'

behaviour (see Chapter Six). This raises the same questions about sexism, as those about bullying above. What particular social conditions allowed certain behaviour to be named as 'sexist, why was sexism conceived as a social problem at this particular time, what purposes are served by so naming? One answer at the time would be that naming behaviour 'sexist' instructs about power imbalances in relationships between men and women. At the time research was conducted from a critical theory perspective. As outlined on pages 18-19 a critical theory perspective involves analysing the operation of sexism so that women may be empowered to make changes in the social order. Another possible interpretation could be that labelling behaviour 'sexist' removes responsibility and result in women denying parts of themselves. It results in women seeing themselves as 'good', blaming men and seeing them as 'bad'. This analysis does not suggest that we are 'mistaken' to label the behaviour as sexist, it merely highlights how constructions are historically specific, and how as Foucault suggested, language determines beliefs, and subsequently, experiences.

'Boys take up too much space'

Some feminist scholarship in the late 1970s and early 1980s was concerned with boys' demand for the greater proportion of teacher attention, in both primary and secondary schools. Boys were perceived as monopolising the mixed classroom in secondary school, being noisy, needing discipline and having better access to facilities and resources (Fuller, 1980; Spender, 1982; Stanworth, 1981; Walkerdine, 1981). In primary schools also, researchers focused on boys' domination of physical space and teacher attention in the classroom, and playground (Clarricoates, 1978; May and Rudduck, 1983, Askew and Ross, 1988a):

In general, boys take up more space, even when they are a minority. They take up more space on their chairs (legs frequently extended as obstacles to unwary travellers), their chairs and desks take up more space, they move around the room more. They also frequently have more space outside the classroom in corridors... it is not unusual to find large areas of school playgrounds reserved specifically for boys (Spender, 1982: 62).

Clarricoates (1978) interviewed primary school teachers about teaching girls and boys. They frequently constructed boys as demanding more space in terms of teacher attention:

The boys are more difficult to settle down to their work. They do not seem to have the same self-discipline that girls do.

It's a bit harder to keep the boys' attention during the lesson (Clarricoates, 1978: 356-357)

This construction is common in writing from the time. For example, Tingle (1985) reports on his experience as an English teacher when boys were amalgamated into a girls' secondary school:

The boys plunge into things, interrupt discussion, can't keep still, can't wait. Ten boys in a class of 29 and they demand 50% or more of my time. Yet the work they produce is

often shallow, non-reflective and is always messy...the boys in protective groups, generally resist giving anything of themselves. They hide their feelings, they joke, they are loud, they are very physical (Tingle, 1985: 118).

Sandra (1985) also observed ways that boys could cause continual disruption within the English classroom. She identified certain disruptive activities as more prevalent in one sex than the other. Girls' behaviour included chewing, reading, making-up, brushing hair. Boys' behaviour included calling out, misusing material, pencil tapping, shove ha'penny. Boys were more likely to arrive late for lessons, be poorly equipped and their behaviour was the most disruptive. This discourse revolves around disruption as a gender issue, and 'masculinity' as the problem. While the expression of masculinity was viewed as a problem, the *concept* of 'masculinity' was not questioned (nor were concepts of 'femininity' and 'gender'). Before the 1980s, instead of boys being the focus, disruptive, and aggressive behaviour would have been attributed to 'youth'. Today 'yobs'¹⁷ are the problem. 'Youths' and 'Yobs' are clearly boys, but this is generally not an issue in the 2000s. Nor is the idea that 'yob' behaviour may have something to do with 'masculinity'. Today, also, questions are not asked about whether boys take up either more space or demand more attention from their teachers.

'Boys harass girls and women in school'

Some evidence of sexual harassment of girls was collected in WBS. WBS formed a sixth form consortium with its neighbouring girls' school in September 1983. In 1984, after two years of SfL, a number of discussion papers were circulated amongst staff following incidents in the school. For example, experience of a female sixth former attending WBS:

When I walked in here, all the boys were staring, and that made me feel like an alien. Some of the boys started shouting things like 'Sexy', and 'Come on darling', and that made me feel worse...inside I felt as if I had to be on guard the whole time. (Internal document)

Feminist educational scholarship in the 1970s and early 1980s identified as problematic the way that boys oppressed and controlled the mixed classroom through sexual abuse of girls (Spender, 1982; Mahoney, 1985; Jones, 1985; Lees, 1986). It was suggested that young men occupied secondary schools and dictated the terms under which young women could define their identities (Lees, 1986). Jones' (1985) research on sexual harassment over a nine-month period in a mixed

¹⁷ For example, an article on the front page of the Daily Mirror, 21.05.05 has the headline 'This woman has cancer. She was punched to the ground and then photographed on a mobile phone by teenage yob'. An article on page 1 of the same paper has the header 'Nail Phil's Attackers: Wife's plea on dad beaten by yobs'. It is made clear, as the first story unfolds, that it was in fact a boy who hit her in the face. This fact is not an issue in the article. Neither is the fact that the 'yobs' are men in the second article.

Comprehensive school on the outskirts of London indicated that sexual harassment and assaults were common. Girls complained:

You see them (boys) touching girls up all the time in the corridors and that (Jones, 1985:29).

Some girls talked about being more seriously assaulted:

One girl talked of her fear of walking home from school after being sexually assaulted by two boys at school. She found it too upsetting to describe what they'd done to her (Jones, 1985: 29).

Girls also commented on boys bringing pornography into school:

Michael used to bring in Playboy and hold it up to Sharon 'cos she's shy and say, "Hey! you got one of these?" (Jones, 1985).

Wood (1984), in his article 'Dogs, Horny Birds and Right Whores' reported on overhearing conversations between boys where they used sexually abusive language about girls and, in one case, planned to abduct and rape a girl in their class.

Sexual harassment of women teachers in WBS was a motivating factor for developing the 'anti-sexist' course. Women reported a variety of incidents in the women's group. From anecdotal observation, episodes appeared to occur regularly and affect the majority of women staff. Subsequently all women who completed the questionnaires in 1985 reported experience of some form of sexual harassment, regardless of their age, ethnicity and socio-economic class:

Physical Harassment	<p>I've been touched on the breast and bum countless times by boys in class</p> <p>Every time I turned my back on a first-year class of boys, one of them touched my bum. When I turned around they sat 'innocently' I felt completely humiliated. How could they take me seriously as a teacher when they were touching my bum?</p>
Threats	<p>I went into cover a class of fifth-year boys I did not know. As I walked in one of them said, "I wouldn't come in here if I was you, you might get raped" and they moved around in a group to block my entrance at the door.</p>
Verbal harassment	<p>Some first year boys called me 'an old bag' and 'a slag'.</p> <p>I walked into my classroom and saw 'Miss. B. is a whore' on the blackboard.</p>
Indirect harassment	<p>I am forever finding obscene graffiti in our textbooks and forever tipp-exing them.</p> <p>Our walls are covered in graffiti, which refers to sex and female sex organs. We spend all our time painting it out.</p>

Anonymous harassment	I have received two obscene phone calls in my office made by unidentified male pupils. I've had notes dropped at my office door with obscene drawings and writing relating to me.
Deliberate humiliation	I was standing next to a 1st year boy and heard him making sniffing sounds. Then he said, "there's something fishy going on".

Behaviour problems were often described as being directly related to issues of sexual harassment. Women talked of boys refusing to co-operate because they did not like being asked to do something by a woman teacher:

Two second year boys were fighting and I tried to separate them. One of them said, "I won't be told by a woman what to do; I won't let a foreigner touch me. (questionnaire)

As I read this now I am struck by how much description of sexual harassment was collected and how pervasive it appeared. Stories such as those above produced images of boys as callous, disrespectful, self-referential. It seems that feminist writers at the time had the intention of attaching an 'identification' to boys and men that highlighted 'sexism' as an essential feature of being male. For example, Benn (1985) argued that dealing with sexual harassment must include a 'commitment to change masculinity':

The description 'sexual harassment' itself rings wrong. To me it conjures up images of 'moments', episodes of coercion, bad times, but there is also something overwhelmingly ordinary, tedious and day-to-day about it. The point is, isn't sexual harassment really about masculinity? But shouldn't any campaign against it contain some recognition of, and commitment to change, masculinity - rather than simply to amend 'unacceptable', 'individual' 'male behaviour'? (Benn, 1985: 7).

This makes clear that some writers understood sexual harassment as 'normal' behaviour for males, behaviour that could only be performed by males.

Data collection focused on performance of 'masculinity' and looked for evidence. This highlights the concerns women teachers had about boys at this time. It was argued that sexual harassment included all behaviour that implied that women were less equal than men, or existed for men:

In its broadest sense, sexual harassment (although varying in context, manifestation and degree) is a constant feature of women's lives. It usually has, on some level, an implied threat of violence. We define sexual harassment as any behaviour, however subtle, that identifies or responds to women as less than equal to, or primarily existing for, men. It expresses itself in all the ways women are physically or verbally assaulted, undermined, excluded, denied power, made invisible, expected to defer, held down and generally 'kept in their place' both by individual men and by male institutions (Askew and Ross, 1988a: 64-65).

From the point of view of this thesis, it is not the record of actual behaviour that is relevant, but the discourses that were available to talk about boys. Clearly, women were angry. Askew and Ross, talk above about sexual harassment being 'a constant feature' of the teachers' lives, the 'threat of violence', women being treated as 'less than equal', 'primarily existing for men', being 'physically and verbally assaulted' 'undermined', 'denied power' 'held down', 'expected to defer', 'kept in their place'. All of these things are done to us. Power was viewed as a thing that males possess and females do not. Adams St. Pierre (2000: 488) points out that this is the humanist version of power – power is a product of agency, we can use it, give it away, and take it back. From a Foucauldian perspective, however, power is not something one person has and the other lacks. It always exists in a relationship in which one person tries to control the behaviour of another, and power relations are not fixed, but 'mobile, reversible and unstable' (Foucault, 1997: 292). Foucault (1978) argued that power is constructed through discourse. He suggests that:

Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere: Power is not an institution, and not a structure, neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategic situation in a particular society (Foucault, 1978: 88).

From a Foucauldian perspective, sexism as a description of power relations between men and women is also 'a name that one attributes to a complex strategic situation in a particular society'. This suggests purposeful and tactical behaviour *on both sides*. From a poststructuralist perspective power is seen as coming 'from below: there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations...no such duality extending from the top down' (Foucault, 1978: 94). Foucault wrote that 'to wield power over the other in a sort of open-ended strategic game where the situation may be reversed is not evil...What is important is to analyse relations of power in order to learn what is being produced' (Foucault, 1997; 298-9). With some exceptions (for example, Walkerdine, 1981), feminist analysis in the 1980s tends not to recognise the unstable and reversible operations of power. Walkerdine (1981) wrote from a poststructuralist perspective when she suggested that women and girls were 'produced as a nexus of subjectivities, in relations of power which are constantly shifting... they can enter as subjects into a variety of discourses, some of which render them powerful and some of which render them powerless' (Walkerdine, 1981: 14). The notion of 'sexism' itself suggests a hierarchical and hegemonic power relationship and that this *is* 'evil' or, at the least, 'wrong and bad'.

Power relations between men and women were not perceived as a social problem until they were named as sexist. As suggested earlier (pages 26-27), sexism was not waiting to be uncovered and recognised as a problem, it became a problem when the language was invented to talk about it. Looking back on the work of Askew and Ross (1988a, 1989, 1990) from a twenty-year distance,

it is striking that the writers, and other women teachers seemed to perceive boys as more powerful in some respects than themselves. This relates to Flynn's (1994:37) point about how problematisation builds on archaeological methods by examining the 'truth games' which people play when they construct themselves as subjects. This idea is developed by Bernauer and Mahon (1994) who suggested that the focus in this kind of work is on the 'ways we fashion our subjectivity...the sets of practices we perform on ourselves...(and) the way we fashion our freedom' (*Ibid*: 143). In her essay on gender and education Stromquist (1995), pointed out that disciplinary power is not only exerted over subjects, but with them. Individuals to some extent are complicit in the construction of their own subjectivity. One of the ways that they do this is by agreeing that they are victims. This point relates to Foucault's notion of disciplinary power discussed on page 26. As well as gathered evidence to support arguments that others must change, perhaps it was important to explore issues relating to boundaries, self-protection and self-image.

It is worth highlighting that sexual harassment of girls (Spender, 1982, Mahoney, 1985, Jones, 1985, Lees, 1986) and women in school (Whitbread, 1980; Carabis and Dodd, 1984; Jones, 1985; Butensky, 1988¹⁸) *was talked about* and researched at this time I have not been able to find any evidence of research into harassment of girls and women in school *prior* to 1980, and nor has it been a central focus of research *since* the 1980s. Discourses about power in relationships in school are not found in the 2000s (see Chapter Five and Six). This raises the question of why power was perceived as an issue in schools in the 1980s and not now, and highlights a central point of this thesis that certain questions will be asked at certain times; specific social problems are identified when particular social regularities (Scheurich, 1997) allow them to be identified as such. At any one time some discourses will dominate: the question of which discourse is dominant will be a historically specific one.

Different perceptions of 'problems' lead to very different solutions. Early work with boys in WBS was informed by the perception that boys are sexist and 'masculinity' was the problem. The solution was to change boys. Other subtexts, which can be identified at the time include that adults oppress boys and we need to support a pedagogy of rational choice. In the early 1980s women teachers wanted to suppress perceived sexism, but also to 'empower' boys through more equitable relationships in the classroom: they recognised that many boys were oppressed themselves through racism and classism. Adams St. Pierre (2000:488-9) points out that power is often thought to be inherently evil and 'those concerned with social justice often try to give

¹⁸ Butensky (1988) interviewed 14 women teachers from one boys' school in London, all of who reported experiencing sexual harassment on a regular basis.

away some of their power to avoid domination; they try to “empower” those less fortunate than themselves’. In poststructuralism, as stated earlier, no such view of power is held.

From the perspective of this thesis, however, the main issue is that it was possible in the 1980s for women teachers to talk about sexual harassment, to construct boys as people who harass, and themselves as people who could be harassed. To see oneself as the victim of harassment means constructing oneself as passive, helpless, as prey, or at the mercy of others. This construction is not evident in women teachers interviewed in the 2000s (Chapter Six).

b. ‘Sexism affects boys’ learning and achievement’

‘Boys are competitive and have few group work skills’

A number of small-scale research studies in the 1980s reported that boys and girls approach learning differently. Askew and Ross (1988b: 150) suggested they may:

- learn different interests and skills
- value various activities differently
- use the same materials or activities in different ways
- approach joint learning activities differently.

Observations in primary schools led to perceptions that girls tended to talk more about their work, for example how to organise it. In contrast boys’ talk appeared to be focused on things not related to the activity they were engaged in, talking about it only when absolutely necessary or when a conflict arose (Askew and Ross, 1988b). Conflicts concerning joint work were reported as occurring more frequently with boys than girls:

Two girls were painting a joint picture ...they decided what colours they wanted and shared mixing the paints. They decided who should draw the outline (and why) and they proceeded to divide various aspects of the picture for each to do. There was discussion throughout the session about how the picture was coming on, how things looked, colours and so on. Two boys were painting a joint picture... One boy insisted on drawing the outline. Then each boy took charge of painting one half of the picture. When one boy, who was painting the road, came to the middle of the page, he painted a careful vertical line down the middle of the road and stopped. Talk between the boys was about an episode on the playground and the only time they discussed the painting was when one boy did not like the way the other painted the shops – then conflict arose and the second boy stopped painting (Askew and Ross, 1988b: 150-151).

Davis and Tichner (1986) examined how reception-aged infants use construction materials in school and noted that the boys chose construction materials, especially Lego, more often than girls, made more elaborate models with it, but tended to work individually rather than collaboratively. They describe how, when the groups were asked to build a ‘tall structure’, the

girls did so by standing on a chair and passing bricks to one another. The boys did the same until they knocked down the girls' structure and took the bricks.

Another study of nine-year-old boys and girls' use of Lego by the University of Denver, Colorado reported that:

In practically every case, the boys ignored each other as people. They displayed no personal curiosity. They did not look at each other's faces. They did not ask personal questions. They did not volunteer information about themselves. Conversation was confined to the technical problems of Lego-design. In every essential respect, the boys stayed solitary and played by themselves (Hodson, 1984: 25).

In contrast, the girls were said to reveal three times as much about themselves as did the boys.

These examples illustrate a concern at the time to show how socialisation processes affect boys' learning. Feminist researchers in the 1980s tended to view perceived differences between boys' and girls' approaches to learning as a further demonstration of the effect of 'masculinity'. This led, again, to the suggestion that boys needed to change and 'masculinity' needed to be challenged.

'Boys prefer "doing" to "talking" '

Observations of SfL lessons recorded that boys complained about spending too much time on discussion and expressed a preference for 'doing' things:

There's too much talking. Sometimes I just don't get what it is about. We have to write about things we don't understand and can't spell (Observer's Report, October 1982).

SfL's getting better because there are more activities now, lots of things to do. In the beginning there was no work set up, just talk. We had no idea what the point of all the talk was about (Observer's Report, May, 1983).

Askew and Ross (1988a) interpreted boys' talk as a problem and attributed this to expression of masculinity, in turn produced through socialisation. In SfL boys were encouraged to talk about their feelings: this was seen as challenging masculine stereotypes:

While boys would willingly and enthusiastically discuss the rights or wrongs of a particular political issue (for example, nuclear war) they were on the whole unwilling to discuss their own behaviour, feelings or lives with each other....It seemed as though they were unable or unwilling to use talk as a way of sharing experiences. We also repeatedly observed how difficult many boys seemed to find listening to one another. They would meet each other's statements with contradiction, comparison, derision or direct challenge. More often, they would simply not bother to listen, especially if they had something they themselves wished to say. The more boys take every opportunity to demonstrate their own

superior 'masculine' qualities, by pouncing on another boy's weakness, the more dangerous it becomes to express any vulnerability in front of each other (Askew and Ross, 1988a: 35-36).

This quote suggests that some kinds of talk were valued more than other kinds of talk. Talking about feelings, and sharing personal experiences was valued. Talking about external events or issues appears less valued. Not only did the analysis at the time focus on what was talked about, but also judgments were made about how it was talked about. Contradicting, comparing, and challenging were viewed as negative qualities.

An analysis of the different ways in which boys worked individually, in pairs, in small groups and in the whole class group was imposed from the early days of the project:

The boys had difficulty sitting still and simply listening when talk is not in some way connected to activity. Their restlessness results in both dragging out the introduction period, by necessity and increasing their restlessness during the rest of the lesson. Also, some boys expressed discomfort with the circle situation. (Observer's Report, 15 November 1982)

A different kind of talk was noted in a lesson where boys planned, cooked and invited guests to eat a meal with them:

The lunch was very successful - it was very calm and all the tables were deep in conversation. At the table where I was a guest, the boys began by asking me the formal questions they'd prepared last week, but this soon turned into real conversation - first as a whole group, then amongst themselves (though they carefully continued to include me). In this situation, they were polite and genuinely interested in talking to and listening to each other. This lesson seemed very valuable on many levels - e.g. the way it allowed the boys to successfully work collaboratively in groups and organise themselves; to be really responsible for their activity; and to set up a situation where genuine discussion occurred. (Observer's Report, 13 December 1982)

This finding was duplicated in a lesson on toy making:

The variety of activities going on at once worked very well. Everyone was busy with different things, yet there was a lot of cross-discussion. The boys seem to see this as having a measure of control and responsibility over their work and respond in much the same way they did during the food work when a lot of the organisation was left up to them. (Observer's Report, 9th May 1983)

Observing boys being empathetic and sensitive to others undermined the construction of boys as 'sexist' and observations such as these led to our refocusing our attention from boys' behaviour to school organisation and management. The researchers began to explore the social construction of sexism, and their discourse changed from 'boys are sexist' to 'schools are sexist'.

c. Schools are sexist

'The school ethos is masculine'

While sex-role theory was the main explanation for boys' behaviour, there was a growing recognition that the structure and organisation of society and its institutions determined 'masculine' behaviours. Kessler *et al* (1985) wrote about the 'school's gender regime' as the division of labour among students and staff, power relations revealed in school rules, administrative authority, teaching relationships, the school's handling of sexuality, and organisation of learning, including timetabling. It was argued that gender regimes mould people's conduct through institutional constraints. For example, Davidson (1985) wrote about how the school ethos can create and maintain the aggression it seeks to control. Toward the end of action research in WBS in 1984 we were analysing the 'masculine' school ethos that emphasised competition and authoritarian traditions:

Discipline, in our experience, is often in terms of authoritarian power which results in control through strength, with pastoral care tending to be more concerned with individual 'problems' than creating an atmosphere within which the problems might not arise (Askew and Ross, 1984: 5).

In our society institutions are organised in such a way that power and success are derived from competitive, divisive and hierarchical structures. The only way we can achieve power and success within society (unless we are born in a rich or powerful position) is to conform to the rules of the institution. The continued dominance of some groups in society is dependent on their internalising and perpetuating establishment values. The result of this association between 'success' in a patriarchal capitalist system and those who hold the power in it is the identification of the system's characteristics with 'male' characteristics: such behaviour as competitiveness, aggressiveness and ambitiousness are seen as 'masculine' behaviours. Schools, as social institutions, are established as 'masculine' structures in which boys and girls need to operate in 'masculine' terms in order to succeed. (Askew and Ross 1988a: 42-43).

All schools are founded on similar values, but it is argued that boys' schools are more explicitly built on 'male' values. For example, in boys' schools it has been suggested that competitiveness is more overt.....In mixed or girls' schools the competitiveness at the basis of all education has been blurred, perhaps due to the presence of girls and a large number of female staff. This is not to say that women and girls are not competitive, but that the manifestations of competition will be less extreme and therefore less visible (Askew, 1989: 65).

Aspects of the institution have very obvious implications for the way they influence children's attitudes, expectations, behaviour and the choices they make. Examples include the way in which the option choices are grouped and presented; the kinds of career counseling available; teachers as role models... Positions in the hierarchy; the way the staff work together; values and ethos of the school; status, roles and make up of non-teaching staff, all give powerful statements. (Askew and Ross, 1991: 127).

Askew and Ross (1988a, 1989, 1991) argued that schools were built on dominant values in society such as competitiveness, hierarchy, authoritarianism, physical force, ambitiousness, and that these were 'masculine' values. It is unclear whether these characteristics were seen as inherently male, as valued more by males than females, or as imposed on society by males because they are the characteristics that ensure dominance. They were seen as 'male' values rather than capitalist values, or values that ensure continued superiority of any social group over another. Although the discourse shifted from 'boys are sexist' to 'schools are sexist' it is still

focused on 'male' values. As stated on page 25 a poststructuralist analysis suggests that within modernism, identity prioritises difference. The analysis of women teachers' discourses in this chapter highlights how a critical theory perspective constructed our own 'feminine' identity by 'othering' boys, men and 'male' values. Thus we are equating the antithesis of all 'male' values, as 'female' values, and claiming them as our own. This analysis is criticised from a poststructuralist perspective:

Such an approach is both politically and personally harmful. Politically it leads to Utopian prescriptions about what institutions emancipated from their 'masculine' character might be like ... Personally it invites a monstrous form of denial where aspects of ourselves, such as aggression, are split off and projected onto others once they have been labelled as 'masculine' (MacInnes, 1998: 69).

To MacInnes (*Ibid*) the organisation and structure of schools is not 'masculine', but the outcome of a modernist view of the world, which stresses the gap between rationality and emotion, objectivity and subjectivity. This goes beyond the differences between male and female: all structures and organisations are based on dualistic, hierarchical, competitive principles (*Ibid*).

'There is less emphasis on relationships and more on control'

When comparing teaching in girl-only or mixed comprehensive schools with boys' schools, women frequently perceived that women staff were more emotionally involved with boys, and a related lack of pastoral care in boys' schools:

In the girls school my overriding memory is of contrast between the women staff's highly developed emotional involvement with girls and the very 'cool' approach of the men. By 'cool' I mean lower levels of debate about issues, more emphasis on practice and less interaction with the personal problems of pupils. (questionnaire)

I don't know whether this is true of all boys' schools, but certainly here there is less emphasis on the pastoral side of things than there was in the mixed schools I worked in. There's more emphasis on merit marks and competitive sport. (questionnaire)

Nineteen women in boys' schools said that discipline was seen in terms of control. They felt this disadvantaged them. Women teachers, attempting to negotiate with boys rather than being more directive, thought they were seen as 'soft' and taken less seriously than 'hard' teachers. For example:

I hate the way that bullying passes for discipline in lessons and in the corridors. It makes my way of working with pupils seem weak to them. (questionnaire)

Women talked about the importance of establishing relationships with boys:

I try to develop relationships with the boys and focus on their relationships with one another. Last year I took four of the classes I teach out to the seaside for the day. I found afterwards that this paid off - I had far fewer discipline problems afterwards. I was surprised when I came here that developing social relationships was not seen as part of my job. (questionnaire)

This discourse stresses the interpersonal. A focus on pupil problems, interaction, and emotional issues is perceived as intrinsically 'valuable'. However, poststructuralism suggests that these values arise within a specific historical and social juncture. As different events 'collide' different values will prevail.

Twelve women described boys' schools as having a 'macho' atmosphere, manifest in intense pressure for teachers to adopt authoritarian teaching styles or be seen as incompetent. Many women said they found themselves unable to work in these ways. They described how the alternative strategies they tried were understood in terms of the 'norms' of the school. Twenty-three teachers talked about how they tried to develop a sense of responsibility and learner independence, but that this was not the 'norm'. For example:

My classes tend to be quite noisy because I do group work. I work hard on developing a participatory approach to learning and I try to get the boys to negotiate rules for classroom behaviour. This is not the norm in the school. I sometimes my colleagues see me as a failure because their classes are usually silent, apart from the teacher talking.
(questionnaire)

Women described the necessity of abandoning teaching styles that sought to promote collaboration, equality, mutual respect and responsibility:

I feel when I teach boys I have to be much more authoritarian and aggressive than I want to be, otherwise they take absolutely no notice (questionnaire)

I've had to prove myself as a strict, tough teacher, but there're still some boys who don't rate me at all as an authority - and sometimes laugh at me (questionnaire)

Reflecting on the above comments in 1986, Askew and Ross (1988a) wrote:

Clearly, not all men want or are able to teach in heavy-handed authoritarian ways. ...Nonetheless, because the threat of physical power is central to an authoritarian structure many men teachers need not overtly express their physical authority - it is implicit in the ethos of the school itself. This compounds the situation since it means that there will be some men who will be able to teach in less overtly authoritarian ways without 'discipline' problems (Askew and Ross, 1988a: 57).

Differences in approach between male and female teachers were observed. In the first lesson with one male teacher, CR noted:

Although it's very early I see two different approaches beginning to emerge in Colin and Sue's teaching. In some of her questions Sue seems to be trying to open up discussion about the real differences between girls and boys, men and women and look for reasons for these differences. Colin tends to give examples to show that there aren't really any differences. When they get restless, Colin and Sue have different methods of control. Sue explains why it's important to be quiet; Colin makes veiled references to detention. (Observer's Report, September 1982)

The quotes and extracts above highlight the researchers' preoccupation with dissimilarity between men and women. CR records that Sue, above, is 'trying to open up some discussions about the real differences between girls and boys, men and women', while 'R. tends to give examples to show that there aren't really any differences'. Use of the word 'real' is confirmation of a positivist stance: searching for evidence to substantiate beliefs relating to essentialist¹⁹ assumptions about men and women. The final report about SfL stated:

Some teaching styles appeared to undermine the aims, which we had developed for anti-sexist work with boys. Methods of teaching where teachers placed themselves in a role of total dominance in terms of both knowledge and control of behaviour appeared to conflict with the objective in that they seemed to reinforce power structures of 'weak' and 'strong' as well as in terms of 'right' and 'wrong' ... We felt this resulted in yet another validation of gaining status through greater power (Askew and Ross, 1984: 6).

Although this quote indicates recognition of the relationship between knowledge and power, this discourse still relates to a hierarchical conception of 'power over'. Perception of power as a positive attribute through which people may get what they want is missing. In this discourse power is negative – being powerful is not a quality to be admired.

'Male teachers are sexist'

Perceptions of being undermined and harassed by male members of staff were not uncommon. The researchers regarded this as important evidence because they saw male teachers acting as role models for boys, and believed this further indicated the ethos in boys' schools (Askew and Ross, 1988a). Some women felt that 'undermining' arose from the 'best of intentions', but nevertheless that it reflected assumptions about women held by some male staff members. Women described being 'undermined' or 'rescued' by male colleagues:

I find myself being undermined by male colleagues - sometimes when they think they're 'protecting' me. For example, whenever the noise level in my lessons reaches a certain point, the man teaching in the room opposite mine bursts in to tell them off. It makes me feel totally stripped of authority in front of the boys. (questionnaire)

In 1988, Askew and Ross wrote the following in relation to relationships between male and female teachers:

The way in which male colleagues react toward their female colleagues will reflect the stereotypes about women in relation to gender, race, class, age and sexuality. For example, some women teachers may not be patronised in a 'protective' way, but in other ways, which are equally, or more damaging. Older women may also suffer from being patronised in ways that are not specifically protective but give the message that they are generally useless and ineffectual (Askew and Ross, 1988a: 61).

¹⁹ Essentialist is interpreted as implying fixed identity.

Women also described sexual harassment from male colleagues and other behaviour they felt was aimed at making them feel belittled or humiliated.

- I was sitting in the staffroom at 5 p.m. when a male colleague asked me: "Haven't you got a home to go to and a husband to cook for?"
- Some boys in my form repeated some of the 'jokes' their (male) design and technology teacher has told them. I was shocked. They were really disgusting - the usual sexist jokes.
- I sent a note to a male science teacher with my form when they were going to his lesson, asking him if he could complete and return their reports. One boy told me he read it and then said aloud in front of my form, "I'm not having any bitch tell me what to do".
- I get comments about the way I dress, sometimes with direct sexual innuendo, from some male teachers - sometimes right in front of the boys.
- A male colleague said, "What's a little girl like you doing with such a big red apple?" (To a 50-year-old woman teacher as she eat her lunch).
- I was shown a newspaper clipping by a male colleague: 'French women are dirty, they only change their knickers once a week' - and he said to me, "You're French, you ought to know." (all from questionnaires)

Women reported feeling foolish, embarrassed, being told they were being 'hysterical' or 'neurotic', aggressive or else (most commonly) that they did not have a sense of humour and were 'taking it too seriously' when they complained.

We wrote at the time:

Women are also blamed for the more overt forms of sexual harassment, both in school and in society at large. One of the greatest difficulties about all but the most brutal forms of sexual harassment is making it visible and having it taken seriously. It is rarely censured because most of it is considered an expression of 'normal', 'healthy' masculinity. It is often described as 'harmless', 'innocent' or 'natural' (Askew and Ross, 1988a: 67-68).

One Head of a boys' school was reported to have said to women raising incidents of harassment in the school: 'We didn't have any problems with sexual harassment in the school until the Women's Group was formed'. It seemed at the time that this Head saw the women's group as causing sexual harassment rather than as giving women confidence in dealing with it. From a different perspective it might be that in fact there *was not any* sexual harassment before the women's group – perhaps the behaviour was interpreted differently before the group, and before the discourse of 'sexual harassment' became common.

From this evidence, women teachers in boys' schools sometimes felt harassed and undermined by some male colleagues, and women teachers in boys' schools sometimes felt themselves alienated and unsupported. The social context at the time allowed this discourse. Again, this discussion has disappeared from the agenda in the 2000s: relationships between male and female teachers are not problematised in the current debate about boys. The perception that teaching styles and methods might be 'masculine' or 'feminine, has changed in the dominant discourse to a concern that 'feminisation' of schooling might be responsible for boys' 'underachievement' (see Chapter Five).

3.2 Study of the social construction of solutions to the ‘boy problem’ – why are some solutions acceptable and others unacceptable?

Solutions to the perceived problems outlined above included:

- (i) equal opportunity and anti-sexist work in boys’ schools
- (ii) commitment to challenging the sexist nature of the curriculum and curriculum resources
- (iii) INSET to raise awareness about sexism in boys’ schools, including developing anti-sexist policies
- (iv) women’s groups in both co-educational and boys’ schools
- (v) commitment to co-educational schools.

(i) Equal opportunity and anti-sexist work in boys’ schools

SfL was initially aimed at extending curriculum opportunities in a boys' school. The early rationale for the course was that it should be topic and activity based and give access to subjects not normally taught in a boys’ school – hence ‘Skills for Living’. Early documentation stated that the course should ‘be task-oriented so that the practical relevance of the course is apparent to pupils’ (Interim Report, May 1982). It was envisaged that the course would be timetabled eventually for all pupils in years 1 - 3 (now years 7, 8 and 9) and would be 'spiral' in design. Three areas of study were planned: -

The 'Human' element includes such topics as personal hygiene, first aid, and childcare including how to feed, change and bath a baby. In the third year it is envisioned that the 'Human' section include sex education and contraception and care of old age pensioners. The 'domestic' element includes cooking, budgeting for food and health and safety in the kitchen. The 'D.I.Y' section covers minor repairs to clothes, home decorating, washing and ironing, stain removal, simple maintenance and gardening. (*Ibid*)

This initial equal opportunity rationale for the course reflected a key agenda for the women’s movement at the time: to share their caring and domestic role with men. Document analysis indicates a shift in emphasis as the course evolved from a stress on the extension of curricular opportunities in a boys’ school, to explicit anti-sexist attitudinal education. A SfL conference report (held before SfL became timetabled for all 1st and 2nd year boys) stated:

SfL is an integrated curriculum, which draws from many different disciplines. Whatever the sum of its contributing parts, its whole is more. However oddly the parts may appear in juxtaposition, the unity of the course comes from anti-sexism and sex-equity. Selection of curriculum content is not enough. We must avoid the trap of thinking any particular non-traditional content will combat sexism automatically. We are dealing with values and attitudes. SfL is essentially attitudinal education. (Conference Report June 1982)

This rationale used entirely different language: 'anti-sexism', 'sex-equity', 'combat sexism', 'values', and 'attitudinal education'. The goal of the course had shifted before the course began from teaching practical skills, to changing the ways boys think. Clearly, the aims for the course were initially influenced by liberal feminism, but the shift to anti-sexism is influenced by radical feminism (Chapter Four).

When asked what they thought about SfL, boys typically referred to practical skills.

SfL should really be about the things we do at home to keep alive, like Hoovering, washing up and cooking. It would be better to call SfL Home Economics. In any case, we are not doing SfL. (Observer's Report. November 1982)

At the time there was a concern that when the skills-based, 'home economics' curriculum was delivered, gender issues were not raised:

C. felt that ...they were not confronting issues enough. She expressed the need to find a mid-point between their aims and objectives, and the needs of the boys. At the moment, she felt they were working against the energy of the boys rather than using it (for instance they were seeing cookery as 'getting in the way' of sexist issues). (Observer's Report. October 1982)

Construction of the boys included that they were inexperienced in relation to cooking and childcare. In fact this was incorrect: many boys did cook at home, and so did their fathers. Boys felt patronised after a visit to a local market:

Two boys felt resentful that they had been shown their own market by their teachers, which they may visit several times a week. "We already knew the market better than them," said John. Both boys said they did shopping for their families at the market. (Observer's Report. October 1982)

Interpretation of the issues relating to equal opportunities and anti-sexism were summarised in 'Boys Don't Cry' (Askew and Ross, 1988a):

We found that provision of equal curricular opportunities, though very important in itself, did not automatically challenge sexist attitudes and behaviour in schools. Learning to cook, or learning about children, does not necessarily change boys' stereotyped notions about roles in the home... We began to believe that boys learning about 'female' skills is only meaningful anti-sexist education if it occurs within a context of aiming towards re-educating boys to identify with and take on the caring role that underlines the way women in our society perform these tasks (*Ibid*: 75).

This highlights the belief that boys must change and resulted in new proposals for the content and aims of the first year course. The rewritten aims for the course are set out in Appendix 5. The new aims were two-fold – to provide equal curricula opportunities through food work and childcare studies, and to 'combat sexism' through a) helping boys' express themselves and 'relate to others in ways traditionally seen to be within the female realm', and b) exploring explicit gender issues. The most significant difference in these goals was making relationships between boys a specific focus for anti-sexist work, and developed materials on friendship. In the second year of the project there was a focus on changing boys through encouraging collaboration, although the work on explicit gender issues continued.

Boys found SfL confusing. These anti-sexist goals were not made explicit to them, and it is clear why – SfL was operating from a deficit model; the boys were seen as sexist and the course did not start from their needs. This probably led to the comment from some boys that, "Skills for Living is against us". Terms such as 'fighting sexism' and 'combating sexism' were used in the course aims and objectives. It seems that there was an aggressive edge to work with boys that stemmed from constructing boys as 'the enemy'. It is not surprising that the atmosphere in the classroom sometimes felt like a 'combat zone'.

In retrospect, it can be seen that problems were defined by the researchers and other women teachers, rather than by young men. This relates to the question of who defines social problems. In ensuing discussion with young men over the years boys have talked about the physicality of their relationships as if it is unproblematic. For example, "it's just life", "you get used to it", "it teaches you to be tough". This is not to underestimate the real pain and confusion, which many children identify in relation to 'bullying' or the disruption to learning, which this behaviour causes. The questions "Do you think this behaviour is a problem? How does it affect you?" were not asked at the time. Thus, rather than an emphasis on learning, there was an emphasis on attitudinal education and skills development to change boys.

This raises the general question of how to manage curriculum interventions aimed at challenging racist, sexist or homophobic beliefs. Work on different experiences of oppression, inequality and discrimination was not linked with other concurrent work on equity and access in WBS, including a project on Second Language in the Mainstream (SLIM) and anti-racism.

(ii) Commitment to challenging the sexist nature of the curriculum and curriculum resources

In the 1980s there was disquiet about ways the curriculum communicated bias through content, language, typecast assumptions about subjects as suitable for either girls or boys, and stereotypes in the learning materials, all of which directed students along gender-related paths. Research in the 1980s suggested that boys demand lesson content be interesting and directed at them (Clarricoates, 1978; Fuller, 1980; Stanworth, 1981; Walkerdine, 1988; Spender, 1980). Scott (1980) surveyed all textbooks used in one London comprehensive school and reported that not only did the majority enhance the image of men at the expense of women, they frequently presented a distorted representation of the world that was even more sexist than the real world (Scott, 1980: 114-115).

Feminist practitioners in the mid 1980s argued for inclusion of a female perspective in courses, and produced new curricula, with resources for use with both boys and girls that included a 'female' viewpoint. Examples of this approach were given in a handbook published by the ILEA Equal Opportunity team (ILEA, 1986). For example, Connolly, a history teacher noted that 'History still tends to concentrate on the public, powerful world of politics, monarchs, wars, struggles, revolutions, inventions, diplomacy and affairs of state' (*Ibid*, 1986: 35). Connolly described an approach in her school that attempted to move away from a 'male' and Eurocentric approach to 'represent the variety of world history and introduce students to a wide range of cultures'. She describes an example of work in the first year (year 7) that involved studying aspects of life circa 1300 through the eyes of women, including their beliefs, values, daily life and work (*Ibid*: 36). Askew and Ross wrote:

The curriculum in boys' schools may also reinforce traditional male roles. We observed a heavy emphasis on competitive sport and on traditional 'male' subjects such as design and technology and science, while traditional 'female' subjects such as home economics and child development were not on offer. Within the subject, study centres on white male achievement in a predominantly Eurocentric way, for example, in science and in history... positive images of black girls and boys and of white girls were absent; in history, the struggles and resistance of black people were often invisible, as was the contribution made by women of all ethnic groups to historical developments. In school libraries the books on the shelves also reflected this bias (Askew and Ross, 1988a: 50- 51).

In SfL a two-year curriculum, including resources, was devised and subsequently published (Askew and Ross, 1984). Extracts from the Housework Unit are in Appendix 7. During secondment as an advisory teacher to develop anti-sexist work with boys, four further units of work were produced and published: 'Advertisements', 'Early Childhood', 'Talking Personally' and 'Heroes and Stereotypes' (see Appendix 8). These resources highlight the endeavour to challenge what was seen as 'stereotypical male' behaviour and offer alternative ways of being.

(iii) INSET to raise awareness about sexism in boys' schools and developing anti-sexist policies

One solution to the 'problem' of boys' behaviour and boys' schools was my appointment as an Advisory teacher to develop anti-sexist initiatives for boys, and support women teachers in boys' schools across the Education Authority. A major aspect of this role was to devise and facilitate In Service Education for teachers (INSET). Three awareness raising workshops were developed (Askew and Ross, 1985): 'Exploring Sexism in Boys' Schools', 'The Aims and Content of Anti-Sexist Work with Boys', 'Women Teachers' Experiences and Responses to Sexism'. The course outline and materials for this last workshop are reproduced in Appendix 9. All INSET focused on increasing understanding of how sexism operates in school. This 'solution' to the perceived problem was possible in the early 1980s because of the emphasis on teacher professional development in the LEAs. Teams of subject inspectors and Advisors (of whom I was one) were seconded to develop day-release programmes of education for teachers in the Authority. These programmes were often offered in response to specific requests from schools. Another important strategy, or 'solution' in the 1980s was for schools to produce anti-sexist school policies (examples of such policies can be found in Mahoney, 1985: 97. WBS policy is in Appendix 6). These are not solutions found in the 2000s (see chapter five): teacher professional development in the 2000s is generally centralised or school based, in response to specific government initiatives. School policies tend to focus on 'inclusive' education, rather than anti-sexism or anti-racism, and policies on inclusion tend not to focus on staff beliefs and values, but on practicalities.

(iv) Women's groups in co-educational and boys' schools

Part of the workshop on 'Women Teachers' Experiences and Responses to Sexism' (Appendix 9) relates to setting up a women's group in the school. Possible priorities for the women's group were outlined as:

- Consciousness raising
- To give support to one another
- To deal with sexual harassment
- To look at the position of women teachers in the school and make suggestions
- Take on the planning of an anti-sexist conference or whole school meeting
- Practice difficult situations
- Deal with hostilities toward the women's' group
- Deal with divisions within the group
- Look at curricula imbalance and content including resources
- Produce document and written statements
- Fight invisibility in school meetings
- Produce own resources
- Think about ways of working with the Unions
- Organise assertion training

The idea that groups of women teachers should meet to share stories and develop solutions was unique to this particular era. The existence of women's groups in schools in the early 1980s reflected the focus on consciousness raising as a political activity within the women's movement at the time. Consciousness raising aimed at knowledge and 'truth' making through shared feelings and experiences of work, family, sexuality, and involvement in the male-dominated left political movement. It focused on collective political action for change. Underlying sharing of stories was the assumption of commonality among women - women were not different (Sarachild, 1975:147).

(v) Commitment to co-educational schools

Since the 1980s many single sex schools, including WBS, have been closed. Arguments for abolishing single-sex schools in favour of co-educational schools appeared from the early 1970s. Dale's (1969, 1971, 1974) stereotypical arguments focused on the advantages of co-ed schools in enabling young people to fulfil their social roles:

Maybe nature intended man to be the leader and woman to provide the stability and therefore mixed-sex education is socially advantageous because this is precisely what it encourages (Dale, 1974: 76).

Dale compared the academic success of girls and boys in single-sex and co-educational schools and found that boys did better socially and academically in co-educational school, whereas girls did better in single-sex schools (Dale, 1974). He argued that the social advantages of co-educational schools were so considerable that they outweighed girls' poorer academic performance.

Research conducted with boys by the Equal Opportunities Commission (1982) confirmed that they prefer to attend co-ed schools because there was 'less homosexuality' (top of the list), 'getting on with girls', 'less pressure to conform to 'macho' images' (EOC, 1982). This report also stated that staff agreed there was less violence in mixed schools. Other research also emphasised the positive value of co-education for boys for social reasons. For example, the ILEA Working Party on Single-sex and Co-education (ILEA, 1985a) reported on their Research and Statistics (R and S) branch analysis of achievement in mixed and single-sex schools. R and S analysis showed that while girls' overall examination achievement at 16 years (at 'O' level and CSE) was slightly higher than that of boys, there was little difference between boys in mixed and single-sex schools when adjustments were made to take account of intake ability. However, girls' examination achievement was markedly higher in single-sex schools even after this adjustment was made. This report recognised that single-sex girls' schools allowed girls to

develop more personal and academic self-confidence, provide role models of women in senior positions, and reduce sex-stereotyped subject choices. The report (*ibid*) concluded:

Overall, however, (and unlike single-sex schools for girls), it was felt that boys' schools did not provide a good learning environment, particularly from an equal opportunities perspective. Promotion of power relationships, the supremacy of physical strength and an aggressive atmosphere generally was felt to underpin the ethos of the school... Whilst recognizing the benefits of girls' schools, however, the working party rejects the idea that these schools are the only type of school capable of offering a fair deal to girls and is also conscious that their continued existence necessarily involves the continuation of boys' schools as well, the benefits of which appear to be more questionable (ILEA, 1985a: 15-16).

While co-education was viewed as benefiting boys more than girls, from the late-1970s some feminists argued for single-sex girls' schools as a response to sexual abuse and problems of access to certain subjects in co-education schools (Deem, 1984, Shaw, 1977). Spender (1982) pointed out that co-education was generally considered progressive:

It is significant that the only critics of co-education are females. Co-education poses no problems for men, it is a convenient arrangement, it is considered progressive, and anyone who is critical is likely to be cast in the light of being reactionary or old-fashioned (*Ibid*: 120).

In the 2000s co-education *is* seen as a problem for boys, and critics of co-education *are* men. Arguments for single-sex schools are again being advanced. This time around, not by feminists concerned about girls, but as a strategy to raise boys' achievement, and at least one new boy-only school has been opened based on this rationale (see 'solutions' in Chapter Five).

This chapter has highlighted women teachers' and feminist researchers' constructions of the 'problem of boys' and solutions to the 'boy problem' in the 1980s. This feminist analysis and solutions to the 'problems' identified were not widespread (unlike the analysis and solutions in the 2000s). However, at the time this was a compelling discourse about boys and their schooling for women teachers in the action research. The following chapter turns to the third stage of policy archaeology (Scheurich, 1997): study of the interconnected factors, and changing events that make it possible for the emergence of 'boys as a social problem'. The chapter explores the context within which this particular 'problem of boys' (sexism and masculinity) and solutions were able to arise.

Chapter Four: The interconnected factors that made it possible for the emergence of ‘boys sexism’ as a problem, and anti-sexist work with boys as a solution.

4.1 Introduction

Chitty (2002) makes the point that equity issues in education are rarely linked to social and political contexts, with negative consequences:

Over the past two decades, a burgeoning literature has been generated by the ‘race’, gender and (to a lesser extent) sexuality debates in education...much of this literature has been narrowly conceived, ahistorical and even apolitical in the sense that each of the debates has been viewed in its separate compartment, with little attempt made to relate the associated ‘issues’ or ‘problems’ to the broader social and political contexts out of which they grew (Chitty, 2002: 122).

SfL and anti-sexist work with boys is understood in relation to the wider social justice agenda, the preoccupations and concerns of the UK Women’s movement, and to economic, historical and political circumstances at the time, including the interests of the newly elected members to the LEA in 1981. Work with boys between 1982-1986 should also be seen in relation to the equal opportunity agenda for work with girls that feminist teachers spearheaded in the late 1970s and early 1980s. At the grassroots level this included projects such as the DAISI (Developing Anti-Sexist Initiatives) project in the sister school to WBS (Cornbleet and Sanders, 1982²⁰). The DAISI project received national attention because it was one of the first schools in the country to attempt to address sexism in the curriculum of a girls' school. However, while anti-sexist work is placed within the context of the wider social justice agenda in this chapter, poststructuralism prompts questions about what factors and events made the discourse of social justice possible:

Justice and equality too have a historical foundation – these are values that have arisen out of historical struggle. The idea of the belief that women are equal to men is not an ahistorical truth, but a social creation constructed within historical human activity...The equality of women as a truth was not created by Enlightenment values (Scheurich, 1997: 37).

From a poststructuralist perspective, the notion that people are equal (including that men and women are equal) does not stem from individual values. Rather, the belief is based on discourse, which is itself the outcome of numerous interconnected events. It follows that if beliefs are not founded on fundamental values, but events, then the belief that men and women are equal can be changed as new events unfold. It is suggested here that the Second World War, the growth of the economy following the war, and the need for an increasingly educated workforce are some

20 Also see Appendix 3 in Mahoney (1985: 104) for a description of this work.

important factors that affected the development of a belief in social justice generally, and the feminist movement specifically.

This chapter begins by reviewing briefly the changes taking place in Education in the United Kingdom from the end of the Second World War to the early 1980s. It specifically highlights the emphasis on class equality, which was the basis for equity work with other disadvantaged groups, including girls and minority ethnic pupils. This contextualises equal opportunity policy developments in the Local Education Authority (LEA) in which the case study school was situated, and these are subsequently described. The chapter then reviews developments in the women's movement. Feminist teachers' concerns over the education of girls and attempts to provide equality of access for them, stem from liberal feminism, and the alternative approach, 'anti-sexism', from radical feminist critiques of liberal feminism. Feminist discourse clearly provided the theoretical underpinning for SfL and other anti-sexist work with boys, support for women teachers, and equal opportunity policy in the LEA.

Finally, the chapter reviews discourses about 'masculinity' in the 1980s. Explanations of what masculinity is and what its effects are (and recently - whether it exists) vary according to personal, political and disciplinary affiliations (Kenway, 1995: 60). Early writing about men was concerned with how political, social and economic changes were producing stress and conflicts for the male sex-role (Sexton, 1969; Bednarik, 1970). These writers tended to accept 'masculinity' as unproblematic and as 'natural' or 'innate'. Later writers (Lloyd, 1985; Carrigan *et al*, 1987) argued that the concept of 'masculinity' was problematic and that different masculinities were constructed from particular relationships and social practices. Beliefs about masculinity are central in the discourses used by women teachers, outlined in the last chapter. It is important to emphasise that feminist and masculinist theories are themselves discourses and therefore also socially conditioned, historically relative and contextual (Scheurich, 1997).

4.2 Equal opportunity policy development at local authority level

The Second World War was a major influence on social justice values generally, and on education. It has been argued that the levels of destruction and devastation following both the great war between 1914-1918, and the second world war between 1939-1945 led to questioning modernist principles of rationality, progress and the social order (www.jefferson.village.virginia.edu/). However, continued economic growth in the two decades after the Second World War meant that more skilled labour was needed:

In the early period of post-war reconstruction, Britain, like many of its European counterparts, was in urgent need of labour – too many jobs were seeking too few workers (Chitty, 2002: 128).

After the Second World War, the requirements for a healthy and educated work force provided the impetus for the National Health Service, Social Welfare and 1944 Education Act. These social democratic principles should also be seen as a response to fascist ideologies that had been so prevalent in Europe in the decade leading up to the war. The Education Act was founded on the recognition that education was central to economic advance and social welfare (Chitty, 2002: 11). Amongst other things, the Act instituted free secondary education for all and raised the school leaving age to 15, with a commitment to raising it to 16 when practical. In the post-war period much of the debate about education policy and social justice was about access to education by working class children (Chitty, 2002: 123). Educational sociologists showed that grammar schools were mainly middle-class institutions, while working-class children largely went to second-class secondary moderns (*Ibid*: 123). The Labour government of the time looked favourably upon comprehensive schools and 'progressive' methods, including mixed ability teaching as part of their commitment to equal access and social equity, and believed that this equity could be achieved without major upheaval of capitalist society (Chitty, 2002: 123). In the 1960s it was assumed that economic growth could be taken for granted (*Ibid*: 123) and equality of educational opportunity was viewed as the way toward a more classless society:

The pursuit of educational equality was an attempt to achieve social change by proxy. More and better education was more politically palatable and less socially disruptive than direct measures of tackling inequality. So was economic growth. Even the most complacently privileged could hardly object to children attending better schools and to the nation producing more wealth. Equality of educational opportunity had an altogether more agreeable ring to it than any other form of equality, such as equality of income or equality of property (Wilby, 1977: 358).

The first Comprehensive schools were opened in the late 1950s²¹, and were planned to cater for all children. In the 1960s, along with comprehensive schools, came mixed ability teaching. Mixed ability teaching was embedded in progressive ideology and child-centredness, outlined in the Plowden Report on Primary Education (1967). In actuality comprehensive education for all was never fully realised; many Local Authorities maintained their bi-partite system of grammar schools and secondary modern schools and the system of private schooling for the wealthy continued.

Simultaneously, feminist teachers and academics in the UK were experiencing a political rousing from the Women's movement, and in the late 1960s were becoming disenchanted with the commitment of educational policy-makers to deliver equal opportunities for girls in school (Arnot, 1993).

21 My own secondary school, Settle High, in the West Riding of Yorkshire, was one of the first comprehensive schools in the country opened in 1959.

In December 1975 the Sex Discrimination Act (SDA) became law²² and the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) was established with the remit to work toward elimination of discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and keep under review the working of the SDA and Equal Pay Act of 1970 (Madden, 2000). Education was a central focus for the EOC:

Clearly, in seeking to ensure that schools met their legal requirements under the SDA, the EOC was faced with the need not only to bring about a change in curriculum practices, but also to challenge, in policy makers, teachers, pupils and parents, traditional assumptions about men's and women's roles in society which, in 1975, continued to shape education expectations, curriculum, choices and outcomes (Madden, 2000: 31).

The growing awareness of equal opportunities in the early 1980s led many Labour LEAs to adopt policies in this field (Kant, 1991). Members of the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), elected in 1981, set themselves four principal objectives. One of these four objectives was 'to examine the question of achievement in education from the vantage point of working class children, black children and girls' (ILEA, 1983a: 5). The commitment of some Labour led LEAs to equal opportunities and anti-racism should be seen in relation to political events at the time. In 1979 the Labour Party lost the general election to the Tory Party led by Margaret Thatcher. The Labour Party had put in place equal opportunity law, but equal opportunities were not a priority for the newly elected Tory Party. Morrell, in 1981 deputy leader of the ILEA, and subsequently leader, describes what happened in London:

In the elections of May 1981 the Labour Party captured two of the largest and most powerful institutions in the two-tier system of subsidiary legislatures, which at the time comprised local government in England and Wales. They were the GLC (Greater London Council) and its independent but symbiotically linked partner the ILEA (Inner London Education Authority). Immediately after the election a constitutional *coup d'etat* took place. Left-wing councillors led by Ken Livingstone voted *en bloc* to capture the leadership and key positions on the GLC and the ILEA. GLC councillors set to work drafting radical programmes based largely on manifesto commitments, which had been prepared after wide consultation in opposition. They were spurred on by the perceived failure of the 1974 - 79 Labour government to implement its election manifesto, particularly those sections dearest to the hearts of the party faithful (Morrell, 2000: 78).

In 1983 the ILEA published policy documents on Race, Sex and Class Equality (ILEA, 1983b, 1983c, 1983d). In September 1983, the then Education Officer, William H. Stubbs wrote a letter to accompany the policies, which was circulated to all staff in the ILEA. He stated:

The development of this major policy initiative has been a matter of the highest priority for the Authority through a great deal of debate, discussion and consultation. All of this culminated in the meeting of the Education Committee on 12 July 1983, which defined what is now the Authority's formal policy, and outlined the way ahead. The critical

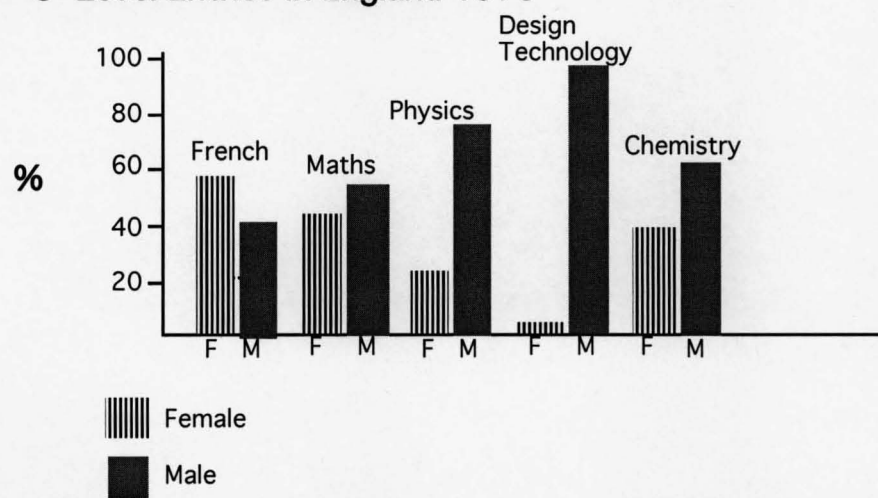
22 Followed by the passing of the Race Relations Act in 1976 and the establishment of the Commission for Racial Equality.

emphasis in the new policy is on equality and it is with that in mind that various lines of action are now being taken by the Authority centrally and through all of its institutions (ILEA, 1983a: 5).

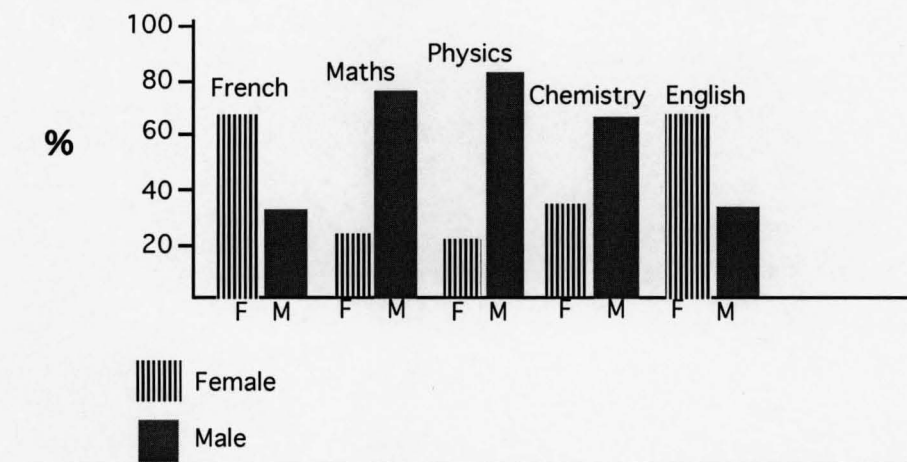
The ILEA policy documents emphasised equality of access, rather than a discourse of difference. In the document 'Race, Sex and Class: 1. Achievement in Schools' the leader of ILEA, stressed concern over the achievement of children coming from working class families, the achievement of girls and of children from minority ethnic families (ILEA, 1983a: 6). The document pointed to evidence to show that there was a considerable sex difference in subjects entered at all examination levels (see Table 1. Source DES, 1979).

Table 1: 'O' and 'A' level entries in 1979

'O' Level Entries in England 1979



'A' Level Entries in England 1979



Morrell (ILEA, 1983) was careful to point out that students' ability to achieve their full potential was affected by membership of various social groups, and that the LEA was not concerned with deficiencies in children, but with ensuring the curriculum and assessment arrangement supported equality of access:

...we do not accept that the designated 40% ('bottom 40% outside the target area of the examination system') lack abilities: the over-representation of working class children, girls and black children amongst that group indicates clearly that other factors are at work. The thesis (that there should be separate and different educational provision for this bottom 40%) implicitly assumes that we are concerned with remedying deficiencies in children when we are in fact concerned to improve our institutional arrangements (ILEA, 1983: 5).

Some writers at the time criticised the LEA policy approach. For example Goldenburg (1986) suggested that the ILEA failed to analyse social class and the use of the term 'under-achievement' was ill defined. He wrote that the term assumes the existence of equality of opportunity and that all students are striving for the same success, which they can achieve on a purely meritocratic basis whatever their place in the socio-economic structure:

This failure to take into account the ways in which the education system privileges the already privileged and ignores the initial inequalities leads to the circular assumption...that the other aspects of achievement are possible even for those disadvantaged by the system as long as they show sufficient determination and perseverance (Goldenburg, 1986: 22).

Goldenburg noted that the ILEA put social class 'on the back-burner while race and gender could be discussed free from the complexities which might have hampered the development of 'public relations' policy documents had they been linked with the one overriding cause of educational inequality', which he attributed to social class (*Ibid*: 22).

The ILEA's commitment to Equal Opportunities was apparent in their appointment in 1983 of an Inspector for Equal Opportunities, and subsequent appointment of four Advisory teachers for Equal Opportunities in September 1984 (of whom I was one). (Brent was the first Labour LEA to appoint an EO Adviser in February 1982. Haringey and Coventry appointed Equal Opportunities Inspectors or Advisers shortly afterwards). The Inspector was a senior member of the inspectorate, and teacher professional development was targeted as a route for ensuring the effectiveness of the LEA policy on equal opportunities (Kant, 1991: 38). The Inner London Education Authority also addressed the position of women teachers in boys' schools. A report by the ILEA (1985c) stated that the main difficulties women face in boys' schools were: 'isolation, sexual harassment and an undervaluing of their contribution to school responsibilities'. Among problems mentioned were hostility of male staff; discrimination by management and governors over appointments, including direct discrimination at the short-listing stage; unacceptable questions being asked at interviews, and general pressure or intimidation to prevent women

seeking promotion (ILEA, 1985c). The ILEA policy documents stress girls' achievement through an equal access approach. However, at grass roots level, the focus included consciousness and awareness-raising of issues that affect access, including the organisation and structure of schooling. The current stress on boys' achievement indicates an abandonment of concern with inequitable and discriminatory systems and practices that affect access, as will be shown in Chapter Five.

4.3 Feminism between the late 1960s and early 1980s

It could appear that SfL and anti-sexist work with boys were the result of policy development in the ILEA. In fact SfL in WBS and the DASI project in the sister school, were established curriculum initiatives well before the publication of the ILEA Equal Opportunity Policies (1983), and the appointment of the Equal Opportunity Inspector (1983) and Advisory team (1984). However, the leader of the Council and other officers *supported* the work in school. The development of the women's movement was another important factor.

Just as economic and political changes in the UK after the Second World War provided the impetus to increase access to education for working class children, it was also a major factor in the development of the third wave of the Women's Movement (the second wave followed shortly after the First World War) (Arnot, 1993). Before the war working class women supplemented family income by working in the public sphere and were a large part of the original workforce in the textile factories of the Industrial Revolution, in coal mining, printing and steel making (Connell, 1995). During the Second World War women from all social classes were importuned to help the war effort. They worked in industry, munitions and agriculture, in jobs that were formerly done by men. For many middle class women this was their first experience of economic independence. After the Second World War middle class women were asked to go home, give up these jobs and support men returning from the war. For many middle class women the emergence of liberal feminism in the late 1960s promised equal opportunities and liberation from domestic destinies (Rowbothom, 1986). Early Liberal Feminist writers, such as Friedan²³ (1963), argued that women could not find satisfaction solely in the role of mother and wife, and that women should have access to higher education and fulfilling work outside the home.

23 In her later writing Friedan (1981) argued that institutional structures mitigate against women's advancement in the public sphere and that women need to work with men to change values at work, leadership styles and organisational barriers to success for women at work.

By the early 1980s there were at least seven different varieties of feminist analysis (Middleton, 1987; Tong 1989)²⁴. All feminist theories, according to Acker (1987):

...address, above all, the question of women's subordination to men: how this arose, how and why it is perpetuated, how it might be changed and (sometimes) what life would be like without it (Acker, 1987: 421).

Eisenstein (1984) identified Liberal, Radical and Socialist Feminism as the three major traditions in the late 1970s/early 1980s and encapsulated the fundamental concerns of each:

...recent analysts seem to agree on the distinction between radical feminism, which holds that gender oppression is the oldest and most profound form of exploitation, which predates and underlies all other forms including those of race and class; and socialist feminism, which argues that class, race and gender oppression interact in a complex way, that class oppression stems from capitalism, and that capitalism must be eliminated for women to be liberated. Both of these, in turn, would be distinguished from a liberal or bourgeois feminist view, which would argue that women's liberation can be fully achieved without any major alterations to the economic and political structures of contemporary capitalist democracies (Eisenstein, 1984: xix-xx).

Liberal feminism, and to a lesser extent radical feminism, were the major influences on reforms aimed at improving educational opportunities for girls and women in the 1980s. Marxist and socialist feminism did not impact significantly on schooling, although important traditions within feminism, and producing influential critiques of the education system (Wolpe, 1977; Barrett, 1980).

4.3.1 Liberal feminism and education

Liberal feminism can be traced to the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft in the 18th century and Harriet Taylor Hill and John Stuart Mill in the 19th Century (first wave feminism).

Wollstonecraft (1775) argued that (middle-class) women were denied the chance to develop as rational and moral persons with loyalties and objectives beyond their own amusement. She argued that girls should have the same education as boys - an education that would allow them to develop rational and moral capacities through studying the humanities and sciences. In the 19th century Harriet and John Mill (1849, 1970) also prioritised rationality, but additionally argued that if women were to achieve equality, society must provide equal civil liberties and economic

²⁴ These varieties included:

- Liberal feminism (Friedan, 1974, 1981; Steinem, 1983)
- Radical feminism (Millet, 1970; Daly, 1978; Dworkin, 1974)
- Marxist Feminism (Barrett, 1980; Rowbotham, 1973)
- Socialist Feminism (Jaggar, 1983; Mitchell, 1971; Delphy, 1984)
- Psychoanalytic feminism (Chodorow, 1974; Dinnerstein, 1977; Gilligan, 1982)
- Existential feminism (De Beauvoir, 1972)
- Postmodern feminism (Irigaray, 1981; Kristeva, 1981; Cixous, 1981).

opportunities, as well as the same education for women as men. Liberal feminism understood women's place in society as the result of unequal rights. There were legal, political and institutional obstacles to women's full participation in the public sphere and women's rights to compete in the marketplace were constrained. In liberal feminism a central goal was to attain equality with men, and liberal feminism viewed men and women as essentially the same. The focus was on access and equal opportunity. As with liberalism generally, liberal feminists were concerned with individual freedom, rights and personal autonomy, but did not confront economic organisation or family structure (Arnot, 1993).

In the 1970s liberal feminism supported continued economic growth to assuage the dearth of skilled 'manpower' through 'upskilling'. It was proposed that women adapt to changing economic opportunities and that men should be helped to come to terms with increased family responsibilities (Deem 1981). As previously mentioned, in the UK The Equal Pay Act of 1970 and the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 made the elimination of gender discrimination a statutory responsibility. The Equal Pay Act entitled women to the same rates of pay as men if they were doing the same or similar work, and the Sex Discrimination Act established the concept of direct and indirect sex discrimination and made sex discrimination in training and employment unlawful. The Sex Discrimination Act 'attempted to neutralise the consequences of capitalist economic restructuring for women by protecting their conditions of service, their rights to fair employment practice and a fair wage' (Kant, 1999: 34). In contrast little was done to promote greater equality in the home or alleviate the problems women experienced in their dual roles. In Education, Section 22 of the Sex Discrimination Act established the right of equal access to educational facilities and equality of treatment for girls and boys within co-educational schools. It made it illegal for schools to offer certain subject to girls or boys only. It also made it unlawful to use sex as a criterion in terms of allocating pupils in schools, classes or groups (*Ibid*: 34). However, as late as 1985, Weiner noted that where the 11+ still survived 'schools continue to operate outside the law... different pass rates are set to equalize admissions to grammar schools' (Weiner, 1985: 2). Similarly, where the 11+ was abandoned, some LEAs assigned pupils to Verbal Reasoning (VR) bands at the end of the final year of junior school. VR bands in the ILEA were standardized separately for girls and boys to obtain equal proportions of each sex in each band. Since girls outperformed boys on the test, girls had to obtain a higher test score to be placed in band 1 up until 1984 (ILEA, 1885b: 5). Weiner (1985: 3) wrote that at the end of the 1970s feminist teachers asked what schools 'were doing to implement the spirit of the legislation'. It was increasingly apparent to feminist teachers and academics that the democratic principles underpinning the 1944 Education Act were contradicted by the social, and gendered curricula, teaching and learning. While Arnot (1993) maintains that the post war belief in educational access and provision for all 'seemed to favour the removal of biological discourses, which had shaped educational processes and outcomes since the nineteenth century' (*Ibid*: 193),

Wolpe (1976) showed how educational policy makers, purportedly upholding a meritocratic society, substituted references to biological differences between the sexes with psychological discourses of difference between boys' and girls' personalities, interests, 'needs' and approach to learning. Consequently, different female and male subjects and curricular routes were designed which would prepare young men and women for different roles in post-war society (CCCS, 1981).

Discourse about boys in the 1980s, outlined in Chapter Three, was initially located within liberal feminism, but the increasing influence of radical feminist theory is apparent. Liberal feminists writing about education used concepts of equal opportunities, socialisation, sex roles and discrimination (Acker, 1987). Liberal feminists protested at the way 'gender' was allocated to social characteristics and roles and objected to the control which men had over all major institutions, including education. To an extent liberal feminism was congruent with the original intentions of post-war policy in its efforts to bring approaches to teaching and learning in line with equality of educational opportunity. Sex role theory (see page 86-88), emphasising social expectations or role norms, was the intellectual framework of liberal feminism, and underpinned explanations about how gender was 'made' in schools. It drew attention to the conformist and restricted character of gender messages (Delamont, 1990). Examples of liberal equal opportunity strategies for educational change included:

- Persuading girls to go into science and technology
- Providing a compulsory common core of subjects throughout schooling so that girls would be unable to drop the 'hard' sciences and boys would be compelled to take courses in child development or the humanities
- Analysing textbooks, readers and classroom resources for stereotyping
- Reviewing aspects of school organisation e.g. registers, assemblies, uniform, disciplinary methods
- Devising non-sexist courses and materials aimed at changing the stereotyped perceptions of girls and boys
- Encouraging discussion by running staff conferences and courses, and producing policy guidelines on equal opportunities
- Establishing mixed-sex, equal opportunities working parties (though usually dominated numerically by women) to develop and monitor school policy
- Creating posts of responsibility for equal opportunities – at inspectorate/advisor and at school level
- Establishing single-sex grouping in certain subjects i.e. science, maths, to encourage girls to achieve the standards set by boys (Weiner, 1985: 8).

Some of these strategies can be recognised in the work with boys in SfL. As highlighted on page 60 the early rationale for the course was to persuade boys to see child care and house work as their responsibility. Many of the materials devised for the course were aimed at changing stereotypical perceptions of girls and boys (see Appendices 7 and 8).

From the late 1970s and in the early 1980s national projects were under way which attempted to challenge stereotypical career choices (Myers, 2000). For example, the EOC/SSRC funded Girls into Science and Technology project (GIST) was set up in 1979 (Smail, 2000). This was an action research programme in Greater Manchester between 1979-1984 to explore attitudes toward science and technology of children entering ten co-educational comprehensive schools until they made their option choices at the end of year three. The Schools Council initiated its Sex Differentiation Project in 1981 (Millman, 2000) – a project to initiate research and development work with teachers. In January 1984 the EOC, in conjunction with the Engineering Council launched the Women into Science and Engineering (WISE) campaign. Much of this work involved raising awareness and challenging stereotypes; increasing the profile of high achieving women in non-stereotypical careers and of domestic and caring roles for men and encouraging girls into science and engineering. Strategies included visits to schools by women working in technical jobs, developing teaching material more orientated towards girls' interests, a humanistic view of science, observations in school laboratories and workshops, and careers education linked to option choices in schools (Whyte, 1986a). Locally, teams of equal opportunity Advisory teachers in some Labour LEAs supported action research in schools, in-service training, ownership of change, management development, gathering and using data from individual schools (Taylor, 2000). This way of working stressed principles of collaboration and localised democracy at the heart of work toward equity, rather than centralised imposition of policy from above.

By the early 1980s, a number of schools had devised their own equal opportunities policies²⁵, posts of responsibility were created at school level, and, as outlined in the previous section, some newly elected Labour councils in Local Education Authorities had become actively committed to the elimination of educational disadvantage. As a consequence, equal opportunities related to gender and race went 'mainstream' (at least in certain educational authorities) and senior educational management was directed towards encouraging the implementation of equal opportunities practice in schools (Weiner, 1985: 4):

The principal aim of this equal opportunities approach was to encourage girls and women to move into privileged and senior positions in existing educational institutions rather than to seek any fundamental changes in schooling (*Ibid*: 8).

However, while equal opportunity policies may have been successful in encouraging white middle class girls into higher education and into some non-stereotypical female occupations, it was increasingly clear that working class and minority ethnic girls remained disadvantaged. Some feminist writers contested the myth that one 'successful' girl like one 'clever' working class child confirmed the extent of equality of opportunity (Payne, 1980).

²⁵ See, for example, Appendices 1 and 2 in Mahoney (1985)

In WBS curricula opportunities were extended, an equal opportunity policy was developed, a post of responsibility for SfL was created, and yet after two years staff still commented that sexism was rife (see page 46), and Askew and Ross wrote that challenging stereotypes did not necessarily affect boys' attitudes (Askew and Ross, 1988a: 89-90). In WBS we moved toward a more radical analysis.

4.3.2 Radical feminism and education

Radical feminists criticised liberal feminism because 'male values' including rationality, autonomy, competitiveness and aggression were viewed as unproblematic and for supposing that women wanted to, and should embrace these values (Elshtain 1981). For example, Jaggar (1983) argued that liberal feminists wrongly assumed that the activities of the mind were better than those of the body. Liberal feminism was also censured for accentuating individual freedom over the collective good (Elshtain, 1986). Other criticisms included that liberal feminists ignored women's oppressive role in the home and sexual relationships, did not highlight the ways in which sexism was institutionalized, was middle-class and did not oppose either capitalism or patriarchy (Willis, 1975).

Radical analysis in the 1970s and 1980s placed the concept of 'womanhood' at the centre (Delmar, 1986: 22 and 28) and was critical of male superiority and primacy. Unlike liberal and Marxist feminism, radical feminism did not draw on 'male' theoretical understandings, or attempt to absorb women into the 'male' public world. It involved explaining women's oppression in a society dominated by men. Radical feminists perceived women as oppressed *because of their sex*, not because of membership of other social groups, for example class or race. Sexual oppression was seen as the oldest and most embedded form of inequality, and other forms of oppression were derived from it (Millet 1970). Radical feminists emphasized patriarchy as the overarching structure of domination between men and women:

This can be the only coherent definition of patriarchy or male sex-right, and it took the form of the rule of the father (MacInnes, 1998: 7).

Theories of patriarchy chart the inequalities which are entrenched in the ways organisations work (Walby, 1989) and the sexual division of labour which seemingly occurred in every society, and was legitimated by men asserting power and status over women because of their sex. Radical feminism was concerned with power as repressive (power over rather than power to). In patriarchy all men are seen as having power over women, and all men share in the benefits of a patriarchal system. Radical feminists, more than any other feminist theorists, tended to view men as the 'main enemy' (Delphy, 1984: 55-77). These constructions of men clearly influenced discourse about boys described in Chapter Three. Women teachers described

behaviours that helped construct boys as 'the enemy' even though they also perceived boys in other positive (possibly feminine?) lights. Similarly discourses about boys' schools outlined in Chapter Three reflect radical feminist analysis of the problematic nature of 'male' values. Some radical feminists saw the difference between men and women as innate, arising from differences in reproductive role, and criticised the liberal feminist tendency to believe that differences between men and women were gender differences (cultural constructs) rather than sex differences (biological). Radical feminists valued reproductive difference and argued that the ability to give birth resulted in women's capacity to love, nurture and co-operate. This view valorised 'feminine' qualities over 'masculine' qualities, and led to the suggestion that 'feminine' values be integrated into 'masculine' society in order to more fully humanise it (French, 1985).²⁶ These views were explicit in many of the 'anti-sexist' solutions described in Chapter Three, for example the focus on collaborative group work in SfL, and the stress on 'emotional work' in the units on friendship.

Radical feminists drew attention to power structures in education. Schools, as 'male' institutions, oppressed girls and women. Liberal feminism in education was accused of being elite and of not confronting power and patriarchy: because the structures of oppression were not confronted only white, middle class women could join the professional ranks and obtain positions of power. O'Brien (1983) criticised liberal feminists for believing that equality of opportunity would result in equality of outcome:

Here lies the major difference between the egalitarian (those advocating equal opportunities) and the feminists (those advocating anti-sexist or girl-centred education). Whereas the former fail to address the relationship between patriarchy, power and women's subordination, the latter place it at the centre of their thinking. They have expressed doubts about the value of policies of equal opportunities which deny or ignore competing educational (and economic) interests, and have criticised policies of educational change which fail to acknowledge the constant competition for power and control; between men and women, black people and white, and between class interests (Weiner, 1985: 9).

By the late 1970s and early 1980s radical feminists were convinced that liberalism and the politics of equal access in school were not sufficient to create social justice and equality. Underlying liberal feminism was a commitment to the tenets of individualism, the privacy of the family, teacher autonomy and the use of education as a means of social reform and choice. This liberal feminist ideology was censured because even if, hypothetically, choice existed, informal discriminatory practices, the construction of the 'gender regime' (Connell *et al*, 1982) and women's evaluation of their possibilities in employment militated against them taking full

²⁶ Theorists from the Freudian Feminist tradition also suggested that feminism should be directed at feminising men. For example, Chodorow (1979) stresses the advantage of men becoming more like women by developing nurturing, empathetic personalities.

advantage of whatever opportunities were provided (Spender, 1981a; Acker and Warren Piper, 1984; Thompson, 1983). The notion of equal rights in education was being replaced with the demand for 'equality of power' (Rowbotham, 1986). It was argued that a commitment to sex equity in education necessitated a 'major restructuring of all social institutions, including schools' (Weiner, 1985: 10).

Transformation of the education system was a fairly consistent theme in writing about boys' schools in the 1980s. For example, Askew and Ross (page 54 of this thesis) were critical of staff hierarchies; roles and relationships between staff; values and ethos of the school; status, roles and make up of non-teaching staff; modes of discipline and teaching styles. All of these were seen as constructing competitive and aggressive masculinities that impacted negatively on girls and women.

By the early 1980s radical feminists were analysing the ways that gender differentiation was manifest in the curriculum and life of the school. Radical feminists in education examined how males monopolized knowledge, culture and school politics, and the ways that boys' and girls' approaches to learning were constructed through timetabling, assessment, teaching styles, the culture of the school and other gendered processes (Arnot, 1993). Girls and boys were also shaped by what feminist researchers described as the sexual underworld of schooling (Mahoney, 1985; Lees, 1986; Wood, 1984). This understanding of male sexuality was reported in Chapter Three on page 47. Liberal principles of individual rational autonomy and freedom were challenged. For example, within 'freedom' was the 'liberty' to sexually and racially abuse, harass, patronise, neglect and marginalise others, and to reinforce traditional class and racialised notions of femininity and masculinity. Walkerdine (1981) and Stanworth (1981) pointed out that the extent to which teachers failed to intervene in these sexual and racial conflicts constituted a political act in favour of a specific form of gender order.

Weiner (1985) gave suggestions for anti-sexist practices in schools, which were informed by a radical feminist position:

- recognising the importance of girl-centred study. What is herstory or girls'/women's science or technology, or girl/woman centred mathematics or literature? And how do they differ from traditional (male-centred) forms of study?
- exploring the relationship between sexuality, women's oppression and sexual harassment both at school and in the workplace
- developing girl-centred school organisation so that girls have the freedom, space, time and help to enable them genuinely to reach their full potential

- providing wider horizons for girls to aim at, and, at the same time, not denigrating the lives and work of their mothers, friends and the women in their community
- establishing school girls' and women's groups to provide support for female pupils and members of staff (Weiner, 1985: 12).

Much of the anti-sexist work with boys and in boys' schools described in Chapter three can be placed within a radical feminist framework. For example, the intention to move beyond providing equal opportunities, to challenge boys' attitudes and behaviours; the establishment of women's groups to provide support to female members of staff in boys' schools; the development of sexism awareness workshops as part of INSET. However, while many schools developed equal opportunity policies and some established equal opportunity practices in the 1980s, the kinds of anti-sexist initiatives outlined by Weiner, above, were never widely adopted²⁷.

In the late 1980s feminist educational analyses became more sophisticated and attempted to identify the class and racial diversity of female experiences within education (Arnot. 1993: 196). The common assertion made by these writers was that both liberal and radical feminism were preoccupied with the needs and concerns of western middle class, white women. For example, Murphy and Livingstone (1985) argued that radical feminism was mistaken to prioritise sexual oppression over race and class oppression, Arnos and Parmar (1984) argued for an understanding of imperialism and incorporation of an international perspective into western feminism. Black and minority ethnic practitioners and researchers pointed out the lack of interconnectedness between different forms of oppression, and that patriarchal theory established a hierarchy of oppressions with patriarchy being viewed as the single primary cause of women's domination (Bhavnani and Coulson 1986). Brah (1992) for example, wrote:

As a result of our location within diasporas formed by the history of slavery, colonialism and imperialism, black feminists have consistently argued against parochialism and stressed the need for a feminism sensitive to the international social relations of power (*Ibid*: 10).

Western feminism marginalised and repressed differences *between* women, and all women did not share a similar experience of oppression (Amos and Palmer, 1984). It was argued that the concerns of white middle class women may not be those of black/minority ethnic women and that the issues faced by black/minority ethnic women are not part of the experience or of concern to white women, since they are structured by racism (Carby, 1982). Additionally, experiences of racism *are* shared with black/minority ethnic men, and resistance to racism requires solidarity

²⁷ But see, for example, the ILEA equal opportunities team's publication in 1985 – 'Anti sexism in the primary and secondary schools – examples of practice'.

between black/minority ethnic communities. Feminists concerned with race/ethnicity admonished white feminists for speaking *for women* as if for *all* women (Ramazanoglu, 1986). This theoretical challenge from within feminism was also influential in terms of men writing about difference between men (the subject of Chapter Seven). Toward the end of the 1980s a number of changes came together, including the Education Reform Act (1988), which signalled the end of the equal opportunity and anti-sexist movement in UK schools. These changes are the subject of Chapter Eight, which provides a context for understanding the 'new gender work' in education – to ameliorate the supposed 'failing boys' phenomenon.

4.4 Early conceptions of masculinity

A central issue during the 1970s and 1980s was the extent of difference between men and women, and how to explain it: until the early 1980s supposed sex differences were explained by biological determinism or sex role theory. The traditional view was that boys and girls were naturally opposites in many regards beyond their reproductive anatomy. Gender identity was defined in terms of simple polarities and measured accordingly. Psychologists identified a range of 'male' and 'female' personality traits. The presumed differences were both physical (e.g. boys are tougher, more agile, more active), and mental (e.g. boys are aggressive, and more interested in sport and computers; girls are more interested in appearance and babies). These differences were thought to be sexually complementary, lead to attraction after puberty, and to prepare boys and girls for different adult roles in the family, in the economy and in child rearing. Analysis of women teachers' discourses in the 1980s in Chapter Three showed that difference between boys and girls, men and women were recognised as stereotypes, while at the same time *boys'* behaviour was described and solutions were based on perceptions of distinction.

The next section of this chapter is concerned with examining biological and social discourses for perceived difference between men and women. As outlined in chapter two, poststructuralism invites a critique of the notion of identity. Identity is conceived in poststructuralism as the result of dualist perceptions of difference leading to a search for the 'essence' of masculinity, and of femininity. This section also highlights understandings of power inherent in different discourses of masculinity, and relates these understandings to women teachers' conceptions of power analysed in chapter three. It was argued in that chapter that the concept of sexism is based on notions of 'power over' and 'power to'. As shown in chapter two (page 26) a poststructuralist critique of power (Foucault, 1978) disputes conceptions of 'power over' or 'power to'. Instead power is conceived as located in constantly shifting and transitory power relationships.

4.4.1 Born male: biological determinism

Before about 1800 there appears to have been a 'one-sex' model of human beings: women were simply a variation on men (Harrison and Hood-Williams (2002: 72). By around 1800, writers based what they insisted were fundamental differences between man and woman, on discoverable biological distinctions and expressed these in a radically different way (*ibid*). In 1803, for example, Jacques-Louis Moreau, one of the founders of 'moral anthropology', argued passionately against the 'nonsense' written by Aristotle, Galen and their modern followers on the subject of women in relation to men: not only are the sexes different, but they are different in every conceivable facet of body and soul, in every physical and moral aspect (*ibid*). Beginning with the Enlightenment philosophers, including Kant and Rousseau, argued that male

and female minds were quite different, but 'complementary' (Petersen,1998). This theory of complementarity was compatible with dominant liberal democratic thought within the new democracy that proposed women's role was as nurturer and carer, not as some women were beginning to demand, as productive citizens free of the cares of parenting (Schiebinger, 1989). Doctors aligned themselves with the complimentarians and began to seek the anatomical and physiological basis for social difference (Petersen, 1998: 23):

To the physician or the naturalist, the relation of woman to man is a 'series of oppositions and contrasts'. In place of what, in certain situations, strikes the modern imagination as an almost perverse insistence on understanding sexual difference as a matter of degree, gradations of one basic male type, there arose a shrill call to articulate sharp corporeal distinctions (Laquer, 1990:5).

Harrison and Hood William (2002: 74) show that post-1800 there was an attempt to ground social roles (gender) in nature (sex), and biology was seen as the basis of particular social relationships:

What is interesting about this is that before the end of the eighteenth century, no one had felt the need to do so. Woman's place in the world order was not the problem that it seemed to become at the end of the Enlightenment (Harrison and Hood William, 2002: 74).

Laquer, (1990:11) identifies a number of changes toward the end of the Enlightenment, that might account for the 'problem' women's place in the world seemed to become, including the development of evangelical religion, enlightenment political theory, new sorts of public spaces, Lockean ideas of marriage as a contract, the French revolution, postrevolutionary conservatism and feminism, the factory system with restructuring of the sexual division of labour, rise of the free market economy and the birth of classes. Laquer insists that changes in the social and political landscape were not in themselves sufficient to produce this re-interpretation of bodies. (*Ibid*: 11). He maintains that a fundamental factor was that the link between sexual pleasure and procreation was broken.

The dominant explanation of difference based on biological accounts continued throughout the first half of the 1900's. Biological determinism at this time posited that masculine psychological traits are either the result of the action of sex hormones on the developing brain before birth, or the influence of sex hormones during adult life, or differences in brain maturation between girls and boys. Biological accounts of masculinity led to a theory of "natural masculinity". For example, Tiger (1969) studied men's control of war, politics, production and sports and argued that this reflected a genetic pattern built from an evolutionary need to hunt co-operatively. The discourse of sex as the basis for difference between men and women supposes that perceived

differences are universal: all men are different from all women, and all men share similar characteristics, as do all women.

Commonly, in the 1970s differences in brain structure were used to explain differences in male and female behaviour, personality and skills. Much of the biological research was conducted on primates. For example, Goldman (1976) suggested that observed differences in synaptology of the hypothalamus may provide an anatomical basis for different hormonal activities and consequently for differences in aggressive behaviour. Research on rodents seemed to show that testosterone, secreted early in development, affects not only the reproductive organs, but patterns of play, mating patterns, aggressiveness, fear behaviour, eating and activity levels in adult rodents (Archer, 1975; Olloff and Stewart, 1978). Money and Ehrhardt (1972) reported that girls exposed before birth to substances similar to testosterone played more energetically, were more interested in athletic skills and sport, preferred playing with boys, were less interested in dolls and infant caretaking and described as tomboys. Several studies found a positive correlation between attitudes to, or actual aggression, and raised testosterone levels and theorised that the hormone had a 'masculinising' effect on the brain. These researchers suggested that there was a link between male violence and testosterone secreted at puberty or during adult life (Persky *et al*, 1971; Ehrenkranz *et al*, 1974)²⁸.

A second biological explanation, common in the 1970s, was that the different structure of boys and girls' brains accounted for supposed differences in cognitive abilities. For example:

- girls' language skills were more highly developed – they talked earlier and more, and had clearer articulation as young children (Harris, 1977)
- more boys than girls suffered from language developmental disorder and dyslexia (Ingram, 1975; Rutter, Tizard and Whitmore, 1970)
- boys matured more slowly and were more susceptible to genetic defect and biological accident (Garai and Scheinfeld, 1968; Ounsted and Taylor, 1972)
- boys' spatial ability far exceeded that of girls (Maccoby and Jacklin, 1975; Harris 1978).

28 Quadagno *et al* (1977) criticised findings of Money and Ehrhardt (1972), arguing that because a high percentage of the girls received surgery for 'genital abnormalities' it may be that parents behaved differently toward them. Additionally, the girls' behaviour was not observed, by the researchers, but was reported by the parents and the girls – it may therefore represent only their perceptions. A study of female undergraduate psychology students reported that 63% said they had been 'tomboys' (Hyde, 1977). Other researchers argued that psychological states produce changes in hormone production. For example, that feeling angry increases testosterone production. Rose *et al* (1972) showed that the testosterone level of defeated rhesus monkeys fell by 80%, while the dominant male showed a rise. Archer and Lloyd (1982: 116) suggest that increased testosterone

These differences were explained by differences in the functional role of the two cerebral hemispheres. Language processing was said to be carried out mainly by the left hemisphere, while the right hemisphere was said to play a leading role in visual perception. Research at the time suggested both hemispheres could carry out some tasks. However, 'the data suggest that the functional asymmetry of the female brain is less marked than that of the male brain' (Newcombe and Ratcliff 1978: 189). This was interpreted as implying that boys' brains become more specialised and it was argued that this resulted in higher male spatial ability (McGlone and Davidson, 1973; Pirozzolo and Rayner, 1977). Critiques of these studies²⁹ included that sexual difference research took no account of differences in ability between girls or between boys. Nor did it account for the different value placed on 'male' and 'female' attributes and skills. The argument that there was no evidence for biological determination of gendered arrangements in social life meant that by the 1980s it was generally accepted that an inter-play between body and society existed (Kemper 1990).

Clearly from a biological determinist stance, power is the result of superior strength, or superior cognitive abilities, rather than a social construct. Because it is 'natural', it is immutable: therefore that men have more power than women is not of interest, nor is it to be challenged. Skills for Living, and other 'anti-sexist' work with boys was a reaction against biological determinism: if biology was the explanation for different characteristics, behaviours, attitudes and aptitudes then there was no mileage in trying to change boys. Biological explanations lost influence and sex role theory gained authority as an explanation for differences in behaviour and educational outcomes for girls and boys.

4.4.2 Learning to be male: sex role theory

Social explanations suggest that differences between men and women arise from division in political, social and cultural spheres. As noted previously, sex-role theory provided the intellectual framework for liberal feminism from the re-emergence of the feminist movement through to the late 1970s. It also provided an alternative theoretical basis to biological explanations for understanding masculinity in the 'men's movement'. The key figure in the

levels in aggressive young men could 'represent a consequence of their aggressive actions rather than be a cause of it'.

²⁹ For example, Fairweather (1976) argued that scientific studies showing brain difference between men and women were methodologically flawed and disregarded culture, sex of experimenter and replicability. Siann (1977) suggested an environmental explanation for differences in spatial test results between boys and girls. Her research showed that gender differences in 7 year olds were inconsistent, whereas 16 year olds boys had

development of sex-role theory was the functionalist sociologist Talcott Parsons. Parsons rejected the biological-difference argument because it didn't adequately explain the social pattern of sex roles, and instead attributed them to the structural requirements of society. He argued that sex roles were internalised through socialisation processes in the family and that in all societies the masculine personality is concerned with instrumental interests, and the female with expressive interests, needs and functions:

We would expect, by and large, that other things being equal, men would assume technical, executive and 'judicial' roles, women more supportive, integrative and 'tension-managing' roles (Parsons and Bales, 1953: 101).

In sex role theory social expectations are thought to define a distinct sex role for boys and for girls, and parents, schools and media are deemed to transmit sex role norms that are gradually internalized. Boys learn to be aggressive, rational, competitive and good at maths and to see themselves as superior, stronger, tougher, more acceptable, and clever. Girls learn to be empathetic, collaborative, nurturing, good at cooking and to see themselves as inferior, to put others first, to see themselves as physically and emotionally vulnerable and easily hurt. This view influenced many strategies adopted by liberal feminist teachers and parents in the late 1970s and early 1980s, for example, giving boys dolls instead of guns to play with and encouraging girls to use construction toys (Askew and Ross, 1988a).

Because in sex role theory masculinity develops from social expectations or norms for boys' behaviour, it follows that different types of masculinity can emerge in different cultures and at different historic epochs, whereas a 'natural masculinity' is immutable (except as part of an evolutionary process). In sex role theory men can be re-socialized and male identity is not fixed. Pleck (1976: 1981) discussed the issue of change to men's sex roles at some length, and Tolson (1977) was one of the first writers in the U.K. to write about different expressions of masculinity relating to class differences. Lloyd (1985) wrote that upper-middle-class young men are expected to be aloof, to rule and to be separate from 'the others'; middle-class men are expected to be good with their brains, self-reliant, competitive, told it is better to think than to do; working-class men are seen as rough, tough, loud, beer swilling, good at fighting, and more able to 'do' than to think. Tolson's (*ibid*) and Lloyd's (*idib*) perspective on different expressions of masculinity stressed 'stereotypes', and 'expectations': notions that are indebted to sex-role theory.

Work with boys described in chapter three in SfL was strongly influenced by sex-role theory:

higher spatial scores than 16 year old girls. She suggested that boys' play and experiences are more relevant to

We take it as given that much of the behaviour described as 'masculine' is learned (as opposed to being innate) and reinforced by stereotyped ideas about what it means to be male in this society. Baby boys and girls are treated very differently from birth. They are spoken to differently, dressed differently, played with differently, and there are different expectations for them (Askew and Ross, 1988a: 5).

This position was based on evidence from researchers such as Smith and Lloyd (1978) who conducted an experiment at Sussex University in which 32 mothers were presented with a baby they had never seen before and the interaction filmed. When the mother was told the baby was a girl she gave it dolls to play with, when the baby became restless, she interpreted this as an indication that the baby needed soothing. When the mother thought the baby was a boy she chose a hammer for 'him' to play with, when 'he' became restless she interpreted this as an indication that 'he' wanted to play³⁰.

Toward the end of the 1980s writers began to question the sex role account of masculinity (Delamont, 1990; Connell, 1987). Analysis moved away from an over-determinist account of difference and identity in which people are passively socially constructed (their identity is 'done to them'), toward an account that emphasised the interplay of structure and agency (Epstein, 1988). It was argued, for example, that schools are more than agencies of sex role socialization, and that classrooms are complex: girls are not passive but may use femininity to resist control (Anyon, 1983). Groups oppressed by social structures fight against expectations rather than internalise them and sex role theory could not account for men and women who did not 'fit' the norms of masculinity or femininity (Connell, 1987: 5):

People are active agents in the making of their own meanings and identities, but, in doing so, they can only use the discourses and material conditions available to them, and these will vary across time and place (Epstein, 1988: 19).

One of the major problems attributed to sex role theory was that it saw both boys and girls as unified categories. Connell (1987) pointed out that there is more than one gender position for men, and more than one for women (*ibid*). This is discussed further in Chapter Seven. Role theory was also criticised for failing to grasp issues of power or the diversity of class and race (Connell, 1994). Sex role theory could not easily account for unequal patterns of power between men and women or ways in which inequalities were institutionalised in the organisation and practices of society. Critiques of sex role theory supplied another way of conceptualising masculinity and femininity, which focused on the social relations of power. A key step was to 'think institutionally' about gender (Hansot and Tyack, 1988). Though sex role language

spatial tasks.

30 Research at the Institute of Education (DFES, 2004), replicated the finding that mothers interact differently with boy and girl babies and reported that mothers were more likely to read to girl babies than boy babies.

remained the most common way of talking about gender in schools in the early 1980s, the importance of moving beyond 'role' as a conceptual framework became more and more apparent (Franzway and Lowe, 1978; Davies, 1989). In the book 'Boys Don't Cry', Askew and Ross (1988a) still drew heavily on sex role theory as a major theoretical paradigm. Salisbury and Jackson (1996) point out:

Even the pioneering book, Boys Don't Cry which is particularly strong on the school as a patriarchal institution - works within the confines of an over-deterministic sex role theory. All this talk of internalizing dominant stereotypes doesn't give any critical purchase on questions of boys' resistance, the variety of masculine forms, historical changes and the contradictions in the lives of most boys and men. It doesn't analyse boys and masculinities in such a way that allows them to accept active responsibility for their own changes (*Ibid*: 6).

4.4.3 Constructing masculinity: patriarchy

In the 1970s and 1980s 'sex' was considered an immutable and universal concept, while 'gender' was perceived as changeable and historically constructed. Feminists differed over whether social roles (gender) were assigned on the basis of biological sex (De Beauvoir, 1972; Oakley, 1972) or, more radically, whether biological sex was used to justify particular social roles (Kessler and McKenna, 1978; Delphy, 1984). In the first argument, gender is about difference rather than about oppression, power, and discrimination – concepts that were central to radical feminism. Toward the end of the 1970s radical feminist critiques of sex role theory focused on *relations* between men and women rather than *differences* between them (Gould and Kern-Daniels, 1977; Franzway and Lowe, 1978; Lopata and Thorne, 1978). These writers argued that sex role theory did not account for women's inequality. If men and women are socialised to perform complementary roles, why should 'female' roles and characteristics be devalued and subordinate? These writers argued instead that female inequality was a reflection of power structures in society and relationships, which maintained social control. They suggested that the effect of explanations of difference between men and women based on sex role theory was to play down the power that men exercised over women. A key point in the analysis of masculinity within patriarchy is that men in general are *advantaged* through the subordination of women.

While feminists were concerned with men's power *over* women, some male writers were focusing on the hierarchy of power between men. For example, Pleck (1980b) noted that the homosexual/heterosexual dichotomy is used as a way of ranking masculinity. Any kind of powerlessness, or refusal to compete among men readily becomes involved with the imagery of homosexuality. Carrigan, Connell and Lee (1987) suggested that gay liberation arguments strengthened an approach to understanding masculinity, which emphasises its dynamic nature. For example Weeks (1981) argued that homosexual behaviour is not universal and that in Western Europe male homosexuality did not gain its modern meaning and social organisation

until the nineteenth century. Homosexuality was not defined as pathological until 1870, and legal sanctions were not applied until the end of the 19th century. Carrigan, Connell and Lee (1987) write:

The emerging history of male homosexuality, then, offers the most valuable starting point we have for constructing a historical perspective on masculinity at large....The history of homosexuality obliges us to think of masculinity not as a single object with its own history but as being constantly constructed within the history of an evolving social structure, a structure of sexual power relations. It obliges us to see this construction as a social struggle going on in a complex ideological and political field in which there is a continuing process of mobilisation, marginalisation, contestation, resistance, and subordination. It forces us to recognise the importance of violence, not as an expression of subjective values or of a type of masculinity, but as a constitutive practice that helps to make all kinds of masculinity – and to recognise that much of this violence comes from the state, so the historical construction of masculinity and femininity is also a struggle for the control and direction of state power (*Ibid*: 110).

From this perspective, social definitions of masculinity are ‘embedded in the dynamics of institutions – the working of the state, of corporations, of unions, of families – quite as much as in the personality of individuals’ (Carrigan, Connell and Lee, 1987: 112). In this analysis masculinity is a social construct.

The focus on difference between men and women, whether in terms of socialisation or access to power, shifted in the early 1990s, and male writers adopted a social constructivist position to explore difference between men, while postmodern feminists questioned the concepts of ‘masculinity’, ‘femininity’ and ‘gender’. These positions are examined in Chapter Seven. Most Interestingly, there seems to be a return to explanations which posit a biological difference in the 2000s (see Chapter Seven).

This chapter has highlighted some important discourses about ‘sexism’ and ‘masculinity’ in the early 1980s. These occurred in the context of changes in values following the second world war leading to a focus on equal opportunities, access and social justice, and away from biological determinism and essentialism. Growth in the economy in the 1950s and 1960s led to a demand for more workers. Strong Left wing Labour Authorities in large urban areas attempted to implement old Labour Party Policies in a ‘last ditch’ stand against a new Tory government elected in 1979. Theoretical debates within sociology led toward a critical analysis discourse, and explanations of division in society based on sex, race and class. In education grass roots intervention, teacher autonomy and localized teacher professional development were part of the nexus of ‘regularities’ that made Skills for Living possible.

Skills for Living and anti-sexist work with boys in the early 1980s attributed ‘difference’ between men and women to sex role theory. Although sex role theory is founded on the belief

that behaviours, beliefs and roles apposite to each sex are learned, it nevertheless is also essentialist because of the assumption that males and females have a predisposition to learn only the appropriate behaviours for their sex. Boys' behaviour was described as physical, competitive, aggressive and so on: these behaviours were not perceived as social constructs and the product of historically and socially specific relations of power, but as quintessentially masculine (Petersen, 1998).

The growing academic critique of sex role theory in the early 1980s, largely based on its lack of analysis of power and on its universalizing/essentialising tendencies, is reflected in a shift in WBS from 'boys are the problem' to 'schools are the problem'. The beginnings of 'masculinity studies' with its stress on 'multiple masculinities' both between and within each boy, is slightly evident in feminist academics' writing about boys from the time, but is certainly not a coherent theoretical position within SfL. Anti-sexist work with boys was a practical 'solutions focused' intervention, and it seems likely that school-led work will lag behind theoretical understanding – an observation that seems to be far more evident in the contemporary solutions to boys' 'underachievement' in the 2000s than it was in the early 1980s. Perhaps this is because contemporary solutions are not school-led, but appear to be led by an agenda set by the media, popular literature, and national policy (see Chapter Five).

Part Two: The 1990s-2000s – ‘Boys with Problems’: Study of the social construction of ‘boys’ underachievement’, the social construction of solutions to the perceived ‘problems’, and the factors that made it possible for the emergence of new discourses.

Part Two of this thesis identifies changes to discourse about boys since the mid - 1990s, and the different context within which these occurred.

As with part one, part two utilises policy archaeology and discourse analysis to examine the social construction of the ‘boy problem’ and ‘solutions’ in the 2000s. Chapter five discusses the construction of ‘problems’ and ‘solutions’ in the media and public policy. Chapter six is an analysis of women teachers’ discourses about boys in boys’ schools in the 2000s. Chapter seven considers the two major competing contemporary discourses about differences between males and females and Chapter eight investigates the economic, and educational contexts within which the changing constructions of problems can be placed.

Chapter Five: The social construction of ‘problems’ and ‘solutions’ to the ‘boy problem’ in the media and public policy in the 2000s

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I review ‘solutions’ to the supposed ‘crisis’ in boys achievement in schools in the 2000s, and the media’s role in promoting specific solutions. Figure 6 contributes to an overview of contemporary understanding of ‘boys’ problems’ and responses to them. Generally solutions to the perceived problem are offered without an analysis of basic assumptions and without any theoretical support. In Figure 6 I attempt to remedy this omission by clarifying implicit beliefs about masculinity (discussed in chapter seven), and about teaching and pedagogy that are congruent with each solution.

I call the dominant ‘solution’ in the UK in the 2000s ‘Reaffirming the boys’ (taking a boy-centred approach in the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment). The second approach, ‘Reassuring the boys’ (a therapeutic approach concerned with helping boys express feelings and talk about experiences), is suggested in boy-centred academic work (particularly in Australian publications), but found less frequently in practice in the UK. The third strategy ‘Reforming boys’ (challenging boys’ sexist behaviour) is not a popular approach. The last solution, ‘Reconceptualising Schooling’, challenges the ideological constructs and inequitable arrangements underpinning schooling. This solution is not found in practice in UK schools, and is raised in this chapter as a way of highlighting further problems with the first three solutions. I have constructed Figure 6 from solutions proposed in the media, books, web sites and from interviews with women teachers (see chapter six).

Figure 6: ‘Solutions’ to ‘boys’ problems’, assumptions underpinning them and congruence with theories of masculinity/ies and pedagogies.

Solutions	Underpinning discourses	Congruence with pedagogical approach	Congruence with theories of masculinity	Critique of solution
Reaffirming boys - prioritising the boy centred curriculum, teaching methods and assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • single sex classes and single sex schools for boys (Blunkett, 2000) • more resources given to boys’ education (Biddulph, 1997) • more male teachers as role models, especially in the primary school (Mansell, 2000) • less course work and more multiple choice examinations (Pirie, 2001) • less discussion and more activity based work, more recognition of boys’ preference for the ‘kinaesthetic’ learning style (Wilce, 2003) • more curriculum content directly relating to boys’ interests e.g. literature about war, ‘Jack the Ripper’ topic in history • more competitive and individualistic ways of working (Grant, 1998) (Wilby, 1998), 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • boys are under-achieving, undermined and lost • traditional male values need to be reclaimed and celebrated • feminising of education (and society) • too much attention paid to girls’ education. • lack of positive significant role models (both absent fathers and public figures) • difference in brain structure between boys and girls. 	Traditional, teacher-centred, transmission approach (Askew and Lodge, 2002) ³¹	New essentialism – boys are all alike because of biology, e.g. genetic, hormonal or physiological differences (discussed in chapter seven)	<p>This approach does not recognise the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ways class, race and gender intersect to disadvantage particular groups of boys or girls • differences between boys • similarities between boys and girls • many ways in which girls and women are still discriminated against • problematic ‘masculine’ behaviours or possibilities for changing these. <p>Nor does it challenge:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hegemonic masculinities • the purpose or the value of traditional, academic, competitive education

31 Askew and Lodge (2002) identify three approaches to teaching and learning. The first, ‘transmission’ is an instructional approach, where teachers are ‘experts’, and students’ passive recipient of knowledge. The second, ‘construction’, is based on Piagetian notions of knowledge generation through students acting on the

Reassuring boys - emotional work on boys <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more attention paid to developing communication skills, for example, empathy and listening (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998) • more collaborative group work • creative ways of encouraging reading and enjoyment of humanities subjects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • boys have communication and relationship difficulties, including expressing anxiety and fear. • traditional 'masculine' qualities are less useful in the postmodern world than some of the 'feminine' skills and attributes. 	Learning centred pedagogies including constructivist and co-constructivist approaches	Sex role theory – boys share certain characteristics that they learn within major social institutions. (discussed in chapter four)	This approach does not: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • address the ways class, race and gender intersect to disadvantage particular groups of boys or girls • recognise differences between boys • address how the schools gender regime reinforces particular masculinities.
Reforming boys <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • opportunities for young people to discuss issues relating to social power (O'Doherty, 1994; Hinson, 1995). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • schools reproduce masculinities. • boys actively construct a gendered identity that allows them to negotiate social power. 	Teacher-centred OR co-constructivist	Sex role theory or social constructivism (discussed in chapters four and seven)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • implies that boys' attitudes toward education as well as women, would change with a change in their identity as males • does not address how the schools gender regime reinforces particular masculinities.
Reconceptualising schooling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attention paid to ensuring school structures and organisation promote equity and social justice (Raphael Reed, 1999; McLean, 1995). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • schools exist to reproduce socially divisive hierarchies • schools reflect and value the dominant epistemological stance, including rationality, competition and objectivity. 	Not applicable because not a teaching approach.	Critical theory and social constructivism (discussed in chapters two and seven).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • may be reductionist if assumes inequality the outcome of school structure only.

Each of the above strategies will be discussed further in this chapter, but first the chapter discusses the role of the media in constructing the problem of boys' 'underachievement'.

5.2 The role of the media

environment, the third, 'co-construction' is an approach involving the developing of a learning community in which student's construct knowledge through collaborative dialogue.

The media has been active in promoting the discourse of boys' underachievement' (see the examples of media headlines in the introduction to this thesis, page 10). Mills (2004) argues that 'in the absence of nuanced, research based, and thoughtful policy responses to gender issues, many school policies on gender are being shaped through and by the media in ways that elide the complexities of the issues involved' (*Ibid*: 343). Mills states that current stories about single-sex schooling in Australia are often located within the construction of boys as the new victims of schooling³². In media reports there is rarely mention of which groups of boys are doing badly in terms of achievement in school, nor is there mention of post-school pathways and gendered work patterns, or future income levels, as outlined in Chapter Eight and Appendix 2. Nor is there discussion of how dominant constructions of masculinity contribute to the problems that do exist (Yates, 1997). It has been suggested that 'the take up of media generated policies in schools has been most active in the area of gender' (Mills, 2004: 343). Lingard (2003) contends that in an era of school-based management and dearth of substantive gender equity policies, the discourse of 'failing boys' in the media has been taken up as the *de facto* policy. In this section the media discourse is examined in further detail.

Media explanations for boys' 'underachievement' can all be subsumed under the approach I have called 'Reaffirming the boys – prioritising the boy-centred curriculum and pedagogy' and tend to focus on the following 'common-sense' explanations:

- (i) Feminisation of the curriculum and examination system, including too little competition (Wilby, 1998), an assessment system that favours girls (Pirie, 2001), a lack of focus on boys' 'kinaesthetic' approach to learning (Wilce, 2003) and 'poor teaching' (Wilce, 2003).
- (ii) Lack of male teachers as role models (Mansell, 2000), and/or female teachers' misunderstanding and unfair treatment of boys (Mooney, 2001).
- (iii) Boys' 'laddish' behaviour and culture (Cassidy, 2000) and/or inability to study seriously and consistently (Smith, 2003).

(i) Feminisation of schooling.

Several media articles have suggested that boys and girls should have a different curriculum and forms of assessment. It is argued that a return to a more traditional, academic, competitive

³² Not surprisingly boys themselves have now mobilised the discourse of 'victimhood' (Kenway *et al.* 1998: 149).

curriculum and forms of assessment for boys would suit them better. This argument is based on the belief that feminism has gone too far by setting up circumstances in which girls can succeed, but boys fail (Browne and Fletcher, 1995; Pollack, 1999). This discourse is the antithesis of the 1980s discourse highlighted in chapter three, in which the organisation, management, resources, and assessment of teaching were all perceived as 'masculine'.

In an article 'Girls on top form' in *The Guardian*, Grant (1998) asks 'Is it lack of competition in comprehensives that is turning a generation of boys into losers?' Writing in *The Evening Standard*, Wilby reasons:

Increasingly teachers accept that boys and girls cannot be treated alike, that they may require different styles of learning and different subject matter. All this overturns the standard beliefs of the last 20 years. But overturn them we must, if we are not to create a whole generation of disaffected males (Wilby, 1998: 9).

Another example is found in *The Spectator*: 'How exams are fixed in favour of girls' (Pirie, 2001:12-13). The writer of the article, President of the Adam Smith Institute, bases his argument on the assumption that boys and girls have different learning styles, and perform best in different kinds of examination. He suggests we develop two separate examination systems for boys and girls – one favouring course work for the girls, and one a traditional factual recall paper for the boys. He writes:

There is an alternative explanation for the recent successes of girls, which many of those involved in education accept readily. It is that boys and girls have not changed very much in their habits and skills, *but that the examinations themselves have changed*. The old exams – O-levels, A-levels, and degree finals – tended to reward the qualities which boys are good at. That is they favoured risk-taking and grasp of the big picture rather than the more systematic, consistent, attention-to-detail qualities that favour girls. One might wonder how the British economy would fare if its educational system has extinguished the flash and fire of entrepreneurial zeal, and replaced it with the duller expectations of systematic and steady progress. One might also wonder, in times of rapid change, if such a Britain would be adaptive, capable of responding instantly when need arose? The old examinations were as much a test of character as of educational attainment. They tested the ability to stand up under pressure and to hold one's nerve in a crisis (*Ibid*: 12).

A cartoon illustrates this article with a woman saying: 'I hate men looking at me in the street'. Underneath her head the caption reads 'Woman: 29 years old'. Beneath is the same woman looking slightly more worried saying 'I hate men not looking at me in the street' and the caption: 'Woman: 30 years old'.

The notion that two separate examination systems for boys and girls could offer parity or assess the same things is not addressed by Pirie, and seems to stem from a wish to return to a different system of education for boys and girls, for different roles and positions in society. In Pirie's (2001) opinion the examination system should exist to 'sort' the supposed risk-takers and those

with 'flash and fire' (boys) from the supposedly systematic plodders and rule-followers (girls). He suggests this is a more important task than measuring achievement. While any examination to measure achievement is likely to be imprecise, this is not the issue here. The suppositions underlying this article are essentialist: boys are greater risk-takers, more creative, 'better' in a crisis: these qualities are more relevant to entrepreneurial success, and can be tested by end of course examinations. I have not been able to find evidence that the old-style O-levels and A-levels were an accurate predictor of entrepreneurial success, or of risk-taking or creativity or character under pressure, or of class of final degree. Pirie points out that girls achieved more first class honours degrees than boys in 12 out of the 17 subjects, including law, medicine and business in 2001 and also attributes this to style of assessment³³. Head (1999) writes that the perception that boys do less well in course work led to the UK government intervening in 1994 to force the examination board to reduce the weighting given to course work in the overall examination grades. He continues that this was: 'on the basis that boys were less successful with the routines of course work. This intervention did nothing to close the gap' (*Ibid*: 5). Moreover despite some changes toward continuous assessment, modular courses and different kinds of questions in school and higher education, boys continue to improve their results (only girls results have improved faster).

In an article in *The Independent* entitled 'Putting the class back in our boys' Wilce (2003) asks why nothing is being done about the scandal of boys performing badly. Amongst several quotes from teachers and 'experts' on boys education is this from a head of a school in the Cotswolds: 'Boys are more fragile than girls. It's very easy to damage a boy with bad teaching' (Wilce, 2003: 4). Wilce also quotes Geoff Hannan 'a long standing consultant on gender issues in education' as saying: 'Boys need a higher quality of teaching and learning than girls'. It is not clarified how this discourse of boys' as 'fragile' and needing better teaching has arisen, or where the evidence for this lies. The discourse seems to be based in New Essentialism, discussed in Chapter Seven, pages 143-147.

(ii) Lack of male teachers, women teachers' attitudes to boys.

It has been suggested that more male teachers should be recruited, especially in primary school (Phillips, 1993; Biddulph 1994). In an article entitled 'More male teachers needed to help boys' *The Times Educational Supplement* quotes Ralph Tabberer, then chief executive of the Teacher Training Agency (TTA), as saying 'The issue of boys' underperformance is a complex problem.

³³ I surveyed 3 individual undergraduate Law and 3 undergraduate Medicine schools in UK Universities to find out about their assessment arrangements: they all said that the examination did now include continuous

But we are clear that we can contribute to the solution by increasing the number of men coming into primary teacher training' (Mansell, 2000: 9). In 2003 the TTA sought to tackle the supposed 'anti-learning' attitude of boys by redressing the imbalance of male and female teachers in primary classrooms: their advertising campaign attracted 30% more male primary trainees (Crace, 2003: 3). Calls for more male teachers are congruent with calls for an increased bonding between boys and their fathers within the family (Bly, 1991; Seidler, 1989; The Gen 1994) and this is expected to improve performance by providing boys with a positive male role model. 'The conservative view is that more male teachers will reinforce traditional sex-role norms, giving boys the security of a clear role model' (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998: 242). This 'solution' is based on the belief that the feminisation of the teaching force, especially in the early years, has contributed to the problems boys face by depriving them of adequate role models of masculinity (Phillips, 1993). While it might be argued that caring and involved fathers are crucial in the upbringing of boys, it does not follow that the presence of men in boys' lives will in itself bring about a change in boys' behaviour and learning in school. It seems to be suggested that it is merely male presence that is important, not what men do and how they do it. Evidence in this thesis (page 181) suggests that differences in social group achievement are related more to socio-economic status rather than sex, 'gender', 'race' or ethnicity. Given social, rather than biological explanations for this, it follows that a key factor in pupils' success might relate to parental understanding, interest and intervention in the education process. Therefore, any programme that seeks to involve parents is of benefit.

Writing in *The Observer*, Mooney (2001: 21) squarely puts the blame on women teachers for perceived underachievement of boys. In 'Why boys can't be boys' he writes that 'I first became aware that women teachers might be discriminating against boys in primary schools when I started to read for a doctorate in the early 1980s'. He asks:

Could it simply be that women primary school teachers find the natural behaviour of young boys too noisy, too aggressive and too boisterous, especially among boys from low-income families? ... And for their part, teachers – particularly women teachers – must accept that boys simply enjoy fighting and throwing themselves around more than girls do (Mooney, 2001: 21).

The idea that teaching has been feminised is critiqued by a number of writers (Francis, 1998, 2000; Mahoney and Hextall, 2000; Skelton, 2002). Skelton (2002: 88) reasons that, if a 'feminised primary school' is one where daily organisational and management practices are based on 'feminine' characteristics, female needs and management styles, the following would be found:

assessment, but that end of semester or end of year unseen written examinations were still a large part of the examination.

- care and attention given to the provision of adequate and flexible child-care facilities for staff and parents (Francis, 2000)
- a non-hierarchical management structure where decision making occurs on a democratic basis (Powney and Weiner, 1991)
- more inclusive approaches to the organisation of teaching and learning, and, correspondingly, less emphasis on the individual (Adler *et al*, 1993)
- school agendas that are informal and flexible (Ozga, 1990)
- emphasis on the improvement of educational opportunities for all with particular attention given to disadvantaged groups (Wyn *et al*, 2000)
- emotional labour given priority [such as the sponsoring of younger (female) staff by older (female) staff] (Al-Khalifa, 1989).

In fact, Skelton (2002) agrees with Mahony and Hextall, (2000) and Hayward and Mac an Ghaill (2001) who argue that rather than becoming more 'feminised', schools are becoming increasingly 'masculinised' in terms of management, structure and organisation.

(iii) Boys' 'laddish' behaviour and culture.

An article in *The Observer*, 'Sexism: Who's calling the shots?' (Smith, 2003: 18) reports that women take studying more seriously. For example, at University, women are more diligent, more likely to turn up for lectures, turn up for tutorials and stay at home to work. Men join clubs and want to have more fun. Girls and young women may or may not work harder than boys, and may or may not have less fun, however there is sometimes an implication in the media that 'working hard' and being serious about education are pedestrian qualities that highlight serious 'feminine' shortcomings.

While the media may focus on the behaviour of some boys - 'thugs' or 'juvenile delinquents' – I have never found articles that focus on sexual harassment of girls or women teachers. Few articles make connections between boys' behaviour, achievement and learning. Reay (2001) notes that there has been little concern in media debate with the effect of poor behaviour of boys on girls' learning,

An instance of a solution to the perceived problem of disruptive boys was found in *The Sunday Times*, 'A few good (brawny) men could pacify our schools'. In it, Marrin (2005: 19) responds to an OFSTED report in which it was asserted that there had been a sharp rise in the percentage of schools where discipline was unsatisfactory or worse, and levels of behaviour at their lowest since Labour came to power. She writes:

Yet it is quite impossible to deal with aggressive, semi-feral children without some physical contact, whatever the risk of abuse... Some time ago I heard of a successful project in a sink school in Washington, where SAS-style soldiers were brought in both to be role models for unhappy, fatherless boys and to provide basic discipline, if only by the force of their physical presence... it ought to be possible for two or three teenage thugs to be marched forcibly out of a classroom without the threat of legal action. There ought to be more big brawny men around in schools, perhaps as classroom assistants in the absence of many male teachers, to be bigger than the playground bullies and able to take them on (*Ibid*: 19).

Marrin makes a number of claims here: that disruptive pupils are male, that they are unhappy and fatherless, that they are untamed and wild, that they need physical restraint, that they can be frightened into 'good' behaviour, that 'SAS-style' big men are the ones for the job, because they can physically take on the bullies. There are no questions asked about why discipline might be problematic, or references to research into factors that affect discipline, when there is considerable evidence that school policy and practice make a difference to pupil behaviour (Hewitt *et al*, 2002). Mills argues:

One major concern with the way in which gender issues are represented in the media...is that they often lead to government schools responding to issues of gender in superficial ways. Moves toward single sex classrooms in co-educational schools, and even in some places Government systems setting up single sex schools (Datnow *et al*, 2001) are often one such response. In the absence of effective central gender policies, that are grounded in research, that demonstrate an understanding of the complexities involved in pursuing a gender equity agenda in schools, that are cognizant of differences amongst boys and amongst girls as well as between boys and girls, and that provide schools with the material support to make a difference, media debates will provide the rationale for many schools' gender programmes. This is unlikely to be good for girls or for many boys (Mills, 2004: 357).

5.3 Reaffirming the boys – prioritising the boy-centred curriculum and pedagogy

Chapter three highlighted the arguments in the 1970s against single sex schools on the grounds that boys particularly would benefit from co-education (Dale, 1969, 1971, 1974). However, it has recently been suggested that boys will benefit from single-sex classes and, single-sex schools, where boys' supposedly different approach to learning can be supported³⁴ and since the mid-1990s some new boy-only schools have been opened (Datnow *et al*, 2001). Many of these calls for single sex schools and classes within mixed schools have come from men's groups who argue that schools have become feminised and that the curriculum, assessment and teaching style favour girls (Biddulph, 1997). The press have also picked up on the arguments in favour of single-sex classes and schools as a way of improving the achievement of boys: 'Single sex lessons can boost boys' (*The Independent*, April, 1997), 'Single-sex classes raise boys' grades' (*The Sunday Times*, August 1996).

The government jumped on this bandwagon in 2000 when David Blunkett [then Secretary of State for Education and Employment] suggested that co-educational schools experiment with single-sex classes (Blunkett, 2000), and in 2004 David Miliband [then School Standards Minister] backed single-sex classes in some subjects (Atherton, 2004). Some politicians go

³⁴ The suggestion that black Caribbean boys may also benefit from separate schooling caused an outrage in the press after Trefor Philips put it forward as one solution to the perceived underachievement of this group of boys (Inside Outside, BBC 1, 8.03.2005). Interestingly, the media has reacted far more supportively to the suggestion of returning to separate education for boys and girls.

further than suggesting that single-sex classes or schools can better support boys' learning. For example, Liam Fox [at the time Tory Leadership contender] wrote in *The Observer* that a 'lost generation' of fatherless young men would benefit from single-sex schools with strong role models (Hinsliff and Temko, 2005: 13).

Swan (1998) reports on an experiment in single-sex classes in her school when in the 1990s the emphasis shifted to 'how to address the under-achievement of boys, whilst enabling the girls to recognise and utilize their potential' (*Ibid*: 158). A decision was made to teach boys and girls separately in all subjects from September 1995. Teaching was aimed toward the girls' and boys' supposed different learning styles and interests, and appears to reinforce traditional stereotypical assumptions. For example:

The English department has gathered literature for a girls' reading box, and a boys' reading box. ...In Information Technology, boys' groups start learning about spreadsheets with an example of the football league offering a familiar context to tackle a new concept, before moving to a monetary example, and then a clothing store stock example. Girls' groups start with the fashion store stock – a motivating and reassuring context for a new concept – then money and then a sports league (Swan, 1998: 157).

Researchers analysing the supposed benefits of single-sex lessons in co-education schools state that more needs to be done to ascertain whether achievement is affected (Marsh and Rowe, 1996; Jackson, 2002). A government study into boys' 'underachievement' carried out by Homerton College, Cambridge evaluated the benefits of single-sex classes in co-education schools, amongst other strategies (Younger and Warrington, 2005). The interim report suggested that results of single-sex teaching in four pilot secondary schools were conflicting, but tentatively suggests that in 'two or three schools single-sex teaching is working very well'. The gap between girls and boys was said to have closed in two of the schools. Even with this meagre evidence, the newspapers reporting this small-scale experiment proclaimed it an unqualified success: 'Single-sex classes get boys back to work: pilot study finds academic gap closes after male only lessons' (Henry, 2003: 25). Jackson (2002: 39) points out that researchers focused on the perceived benefits of single-sex classes in relation to achievement and ignored the effects on relationships and behaviour. His (2002: 42) research with young people who have experienced single-sex mathematics concurs with findings in the 1980s (EOC, 1982) that while girls were generally enthusiastic and reported feeling more confident, boys were:

...far more ambivalent and a substantial number reported negative effects of single-sex lessons in co-education schools. These negative effects included the perception that they received more punishment in boy-only groups, and that there was more 'fighting and roughness', more distractions, more aggression and more competition. According to one boy: 'more fights, more noise and more cheating' (*Ibid*: 44).

This supports the perception in the early 1980s that in single sex schools 'boys may be preoccupied with each other to the point where it affects practically everything they do, including their concentration and performance in their work and their relationship with teachers'

(Askew and Ross, 1988a: 34). Mathews (1998) makes a strong appeal against single sex classes and single sex schools arguing that they are:

...inherently based on biological determinist principles and are structurally sexist because they separate people on the grounds of biological sex alone rather than culture, or class, or sexuality (Mathews, 1998: 179).

Mathews reasons that inequalities have to be tackled jointly:

The arguments about how to combat discrimination are about the processes of liberation and domination and include the development of self-esteem, self-definition and co-operation. Also, since the 'self' can have a mature meaning only in relationship to others, combined with an acceptance of *differences*, sexism, racism and other discriminations have to be tackled jointly. To focus on one hinders this understanding. So to argue for single-sex schools, which prioritise sex, is to distort movement towards liberation for all (Mathews, 1998: 180).

Drawing on psychoanalytical notions, as do other social constructivists (see page 155), Mathews, makes the point that the possibilities for splitting (denying parts of oneself) and projecting (locating this part in someone else) are multiplied in single-sex settings. Girls can deny their aggression and hard side and project it onto boys in order to confirm their femininity: boys can deny their emotional, soft side and project this onto girls more easily in a single-sex environment:

The single-sex environment is important in that it provides group solidarity and enables cathartic talk. If unchecked, however, it can be very negative. Male group solidarity and project processes enable 'stereotypical-females' to become the repository for society's ills. Female teachers who enter this environment soon become painfully aware of this, and some boys confirm their 'masculinity' by displaying their lack of emotion and aggressiveness (*Ibid*, 1998).

Other writers have explored the negative effects of single-sex boys' schools for boys' perceptions and constructions of girls and women, as well as their treatment of each other (Askew and Ross, 1988a; Roulston and Mills, 2000; Martino and Meyenn, 2002).

Robinson and Smithers (1999), reflecting on the assertion that both boys and girls achieve more highly in single-sex schools, propose that:

The outstanding performance of the single-sex schools in the examination league tables has much more to do with academic selection, socioeconomic background and the standing of the school itself than with the segregation of the sexes. When as far as possible, like is compared with like, the apparent academic differences between single-sex and co-education schools largely disappear (Robinson and Smithers, 1999: 23).

The importance of pedagogy and good classroom practice to improve students' outcomes, rather than single-sex schools, is supported by a substantial amount of research (McEwan *et al*, 1997; Rennie and Parker, 1997; Harker, 2000; Jackson and Smith, 2000; Martino and Meyenn, 2002;

Rowan *et al* 2002; Lingard *et al* 2002). However, some strategies, like that suggested for making lessons more structured below, seem to rest on the assumption that specific techniques for clarifying learning outcomes are ‘boy-friendly’ rather than useful suggestions for supporting and clarifying outcomes for all: for example, ‘Boys learn best if there is a clear framework for the tasks they are set. Do not say, “find examples of...” say “find 5 examples of...” ‘. (Duffy, 2002: 15-18).

Those arguing for single-sex classes and schools appear to believe that schools *have* made considerable shifts away from traditional, authoritarian, individualistic styles of pedagogy and from a traditional academic and competitive curriculum and call for a return to these forms of pedagogy and knowledge production. ‘Underachievement’ is often attributed to the supposed feminised school environment where curricula, pedagogy, and assessment tasks favour girls’ ‘natural’ learning styles and are inconsistent with the learning styles of boys (Biddulph, 1997; Gurian, 1999; Pollack, 1999; Kindlon and Thompson, 1999). It is difficult to find evidence for these wholesale changes in pedagogy and curriculum content. It appears likely that teacher-centred learning, and a traditional content/objectives driven curriculum is still the norm.

In line with suggestions that girls and boys respond better to different pedagogies, are suggestions that boys need to be differently motivated. For example, among many eminently sensible suggestions for raising boys’ achievement (many of which would raise achievement of all children) one Education Authority states ‘Boys need proportionately more feedback than girls to remain motivated and on task’, ‘To improve, boys need a clear understanding of what they need to do to make progress’ and ‘Boys need more frequent monitoring, feedback and reassurance than girls’ (www.devon.gov.uk/dcs/a/boys/index.html).

It is also suggested that boys do better in individualistic rather than collaborative learning situations. For example, the same Local Education Authority’s Raising Boys Achievement Advisory Group suggests³⁵ competition as a strategy, and that:

‘Boys respond positively to quizzes, challenges’, and

‘Boys need encouraging to discuss their ideas for narrative writing which involves feelings. Not a good idea to start with collaborative work as the research keeps repeating that need (sic) a lot of encouragement to write about affective aspects of experience or about feelings’ (www.devon.gov.uk/dcs/a/boys/index.html).

³⁵ On page 10 of this thesis it was noted that in 2001 Stephen Byers, then School Standards Minister, announced a new approach to ‘tackling boys’ achievement’ in the form of legislation requiring each local education authority to make a commitment to raising boys’ achievement as part of their Educational Development Plans (BBC News Online, 2001).

Again it is difficult to find evidence for a wholesale change toward collaboration. It may be that the majority of teaching, in secondary schools particularly, has always been and remains individualistic and teacher-centred. Underpinning the solutions offered here is the belief that 'girls have had it too good for too long' (see Barber quote on page 235) - a belief implicitly anchored in the notion that extensive changes in pedagogy toward constructivist and co-constructivist pedagogy (see footnote 32) and course work *have* taken place and favour girls. Writers arguing that boys' supposed underachievement has arisen from these pedagogical changes appear not to base their conclusions on evidence that these changes *have* occurred in the mainstream secondary curriculum, and ignore evidence that where boys and girls take the same examinations, girls have always outperformed boys.

These solutions view the outcomes of education in terms of success measured by examination results. This outcomes model is not problematised, nor is an aggressive hegemonic 'masculinity', nor is an education system based on a schooling unbalanced in favour of rational, competitive values, nor is behaviour that involves harassment of girls, women, and other boys that do not fit the hegemonic stereotype, or the damage that such stereotypes might lead to for all boys, including for their learning and achievement in school. In this approach, there is an assumption that boys and girls have innately different learning styles and approaches to learning based on inconclusive and conflicting evidence from biological studies and the claim that boys' and girls' brains do not work in the same way and that our education system should reflect this (Tooley, 2002).

One example of this approach was found in a poster in a primary school classroom in Kent in February 2005, produced by Kent LEA and titled 'Different and Equal'. The heading to the poster is 'Boys and girls, men and women *are* different'. The poster states:

Overall in the UK and in Kent boys achieve less well than girls, at all levels of school and in virtually all subjects. This has not always been the case. As the education system has changed in recent years, girls have overtaken boys even in traditional male strengths such as Mathematics. There is not evidence that either sex is intrinsically more able than the other, though there are some differences in the ways boys and girls think and learn. Girls and boys' brains and bodies are different. This means that in general:

Girls:

- are often good at doing more than one thing at a time (feeling, thinking and speaking (multitasking))
- often prefer visual or auditory styles of learning

Boys:

- can work in a very focused, even competitive way on tasks that interest them, but often find it hard to 'multitask'
- often have a preference for a more kinaesthetic learning style

(www.saskent.org.uk)

This poster makes a number of contested claims. For example, Chapters Four and Seven highlight the disagreements about brain differences. The perceptions that boys are competitive, find it hard to multitask and have a kinaesthetic learning style make no concession to critiques of learning style (Coffield et al, 2004) or contemporary ideas about multiple masculinities outlined in Chapter Seven. These discourses are stated as fact, rather than as beliefs. Suggestions follow in the poster, above, about how schools can accommodate boys' 'preferred' learning styles. This poster clarifies that some discourses used in the 2000s and 1980s are the same. For example, discourses focussing on boys' perceived competitiveness, and preference for activity or 'doing'. However, different values are attached to the perceived differences. As shown in chapter three, in the 1980s women teachers attached a negative value to competition: their solution was to provide collaborative activities.

In the Kent poster, differences in brain structure explain perceived dissimilarity in the ways boys and girls learn, and also in the ways that they *think*. Clearly thinking is related to values and beliefs, and it is difficult to conceive of different values and beliefs being determined by biology. From a poststructuralist standpoint, thought is limited to what language makes available, in turn produced by the social regularities. From this perspective, differences in thinking could be possible, but would be explained by different archaeological conjunctions.

Kirklees Education Authority (Wilson, 1999; Hartley-Brewer, 2000; Noble 1998) develop a number of strategies, including raising awareness, whole school strategies and classroom specific techniques (Noble, 1998), some of which involve parents. For example:

- parents getting boys to express their feelings and spending time reading with them. Making reading competitive, bringing men into school as role models, addressing the anti-swot culture (Noble, 1998: 23-27).
- addressing bullying and other 'unacceptable' elements of boy culture changes to pedagogy, raising awareness in PSHE and assemblies, and raising boys' self esteem (Wilson, 1999).

Wilson (1999), Head of English at Newsome school in Kirklees Authority remarks that 'anything you do to address the issue of changing boys' attitudes, improving behaviour and raising achievement has a direct effect on girls'. He describes action research across Kirklees schools that involved teachers in investigating and monitoring boys' attitudes, behaviour and achievement. While this approach appears to be rooted in action research into factors affecting boys' attitudes to learning, it still stems from a perception that boys' approach to learning is different from that of girls', and that girls do not merit a special or equal focus. In addition boys' learning needs are viewed as homogenous, including in relation to ethnicity, culture and socio-economic status. Some of the assumptions and arguments underpinning this approach are difficult to support through evidence. For example the assumptions below that an 'anti-swot'

culture is either partly genetic, or the result of growing up in a family of one ineffectual (female) parent:

Many observers view the anti-swot culture as the pre-eminent reason for boys' under achievement... There is a great deal of sense in this, but it is a reductionist argument. The anti-swot culture is not born of the ether. It has roots in the range of experiences boys go through which interplay with a genetic predisposition, the importance of which we can only guess... Discussion about the social and educational effect upon children of one-parent families is not always welcome. Nevertheless it would be dishonest to pretend that the million and a half families headed by a single, normally female, parent does not sometimes have a dramatic effect... There are a large number of boys who may not come across an authoritative adult male until they reach secondary school (Noble, 1998: 26).

The assumption made in an approach based on a return to a boy-centred curriculum and methods of assessment, appears to be that boys *used* not to have a problem. As has been suggested elsewhere in this thesis (pages 12-13), working class boys have had problems in school for a long time – before the perceived 'feminisation' of the curriculum, and before the rise of divorce and single parenting. An approach to gender work that is concerned with boys and girls is preferable, although may not address the ethnic and social status issues, and may still be informed by stereotypical assumptions about *all* boys and *all* girls. For example that they have different learning styles:

Structuring classroom talk... focuses on developing risk-taking skills in girls, while at the same time improving boys' use of language. Geoff Hannan advocates abandoning the use of hands going up at the start of lessons as it encourages the more confident pupils, with up to seven boys' hands going up to one girl's. The teacher then goes to the boys and, in the authors' experience and observation, often gets an ill-considered response. The preferred strategy is to ask a question of the whole class with a clearly defined expectation as to number of responses and a set time. Pupils then talk and work out a number of possible responses. Individuals are asked to respond by name. Girls can safely risk an answer, having gone through *their preferred learning style of language use (my emphasis)*. Boys will have gone through a language process before being allowed to risk an answer. All pupils, therefore, will be actively involved in the education process from the start of the lesson (Terry and Terry, 1998: 115).

To summarise, some of the strategies for improving boys' achievement suggested in the approach I explored in this section, 'Reaffirming the boys', are recommended in *The Times Educational Supplement* (Duffy, 2002: 15-18) as follows:

- (i) Make learning more competitive
- (ii) Praise boys more and make opportunities for public recognition of success
- (iii) Make learning more structured
- (iv) Check that resources and role models are boy-friendly
- (v) Make reading central
- (vi) Monitor progress and give extra support
- (vii) Make learning more active – more practical investigation and more role play
- (viii) Involve pupils, staff, parents and governors

Chapter three highlighted that strategies (i), (ii) and (iv) were all aspects of teaching in a mixed school that feminist teachers and academics suggested had a negative impact on girls (and boys). Additionally strategies (i) and (ii) are not supported by current effective learning literature (Askew and Carnell, 1998; Carnell and Lodge, 2002; Watkins, 2005) that argues for co-constructivism within a collaborative learning community. Neither is competition supported by educational theories that analyse the role of education in bringing about change toward a more harmonious world order through collaboration, dialogue and joint problem solving (Delors, 1996; Davidson and Worsham, 1992; Criticos, 1993).

5.4 Reassuring the boys - emotional work

This strategy is derived from the belief that socialisation processes disadvantage boys and the solution is to develop special programmes, which resocialise boys and teach them conflict resolution and negotiation skills, co-operative and collaborative skills, communication and affective skills. This is congruent with one strand of the Skills for Living programme described in chapter three. The goal is to change boys so they become more expressive and collaborative as a means to improve their achievement and emotional health. As with SfL, emotional work with boys appears to be underpinned by sex role theory, outlined in chapter four. This approach often comes from a strand of the men's movement that stresses the problems of being a man, including negative effects on health, relationships, limited emotional options, the lean toward aggression, conflict and competition (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998; Salisbury and Jackson, 1996). For example, Middleton (1992: 190) suggests that the capacity for empathy and emotional connectedness with the experience of other people is absent in male social development, and that this should be remedied. Classes on male experience and discussion about the negative effects of 'masculinity' for boys are suggested. This solution, aims to develop more 'feminine' attributes, which are expected to benefit boys, and the work, write Salisbury and Jackson (1996), needs to be supportive to boys not critical of them. Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) argue that:

Personal work is important if boys are to be enabled to see why certain ways of being masculine seem desirable, why their anxieties might lead them to conform to these models, and how this conformity can prevent them from developing their humanity in all its forms, and from enjoying rewarding relationships with others (*Ibid*: 233-4).

Emotional work with boys may also stress the importance of language-based skills and humanities work to enable them to express feelings. One aspect of 'male' culture seen as problematic, is antipathy to humanities subjects, which are seemingly viewed by boys as inherently 'female', thus explaining low participation of boys in these subjects.

An assumption underpinning emotional work with boys is that as boys become more expressive and collaborative their behaviour will improve and learning outcomes will benefit. Personal development, as at WBS, may focus on the affective experience of students, how they feel

about their relations with others, and their associated self-concept, self-confidence and self-esteem (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998: 232-3). This is a therapeutic approach. Rather than a focus on what boys do, it emphasises enjoying and feeling good about being a boy, and reflects a focus on the inner struggle with masculinity.

This approach may also involve skills training, for example, strategies for negotiating sexual activity between men and women. Some feminists are critical of this (Hinson, 1995) because they argue that conflict resolution or mediation assumes a conflict between equal partners. Hinson maintains that instead, we need to teach about the power relations that sustain unequal situations, for example, harassment. Hinson (1995) also criticises this approach because she contends there are no established causal links between constructs such as self-concept, self-esteem or self-confidence and practices involving harassment or other behaviours. Martino suggests that the transformative capacities of humanities subjects are often taken for granted by those who propose gender-based strategies for boys. Such transformation is not automatically developed by language-based skills and humanities education (*Ibid*, 1994): subjects like history themselves have a history of participation in gender, racial and nationalist oppression and verbal harassment and emotional abuse are techniques that can be effectively utilised by men with sophisticated language skills (McLean, 1995). Furthermore, boys' achievement in humanities subjects, and low take-up at higher levels, does not take into account boys' resistance to subjects with a lower status than mathematics, sciences and technologies:

Girls' push into traditionally 'male' subjects involves a challenge to existing power structures, and implies a rise in status. Boys' entrance into traditionally 'female' subjects would imply a loss of status and a decrease in potential social power. Boys recognise this clearly, and any programs seeking to change their choices will have to show them some good reasons why they should abdicate from men's traditional position of dominance. Adult men have, as yet, failed to come to terms with this question, so expecting boys to accept it unquestioningly is rather unrealistic (McLean, 1995: 31-32).

Emotional work with boys does not acknowledge the role of school and society in perpetuating existing structural power relations between men and women, between men, and between women. Nor does it recognise other major social factors, such as class and race that affect social experience along with gender. For example, boys' refusal to co-operate with authority structures may have as much to do with class factors as with gender (Willis, 1977). Solutions in this section do not attend to broad social structures, but rather stress change at the personal and interpersonal level. MacInnes suggests that encouraging men to articulate their emotions may be positive, but is unlikely to produce social change, because it confuses identity and ideology:

The public discussion of emotion, and the sociology which imagines that it analyses it, does not therefore constitute either the liberation of the self, or the political struggle to change oppressive identities. It is the voyeuristic invasion of the private space of others by weak selves without enough capacity to be alone. To the extent that sociology has become focused on identity, emotion and the subjective, without reflecting critically

enough on its material basis in social relations, it has become a part of the development of the mass culture of modernity that it ought to be analysing rather than uncritically adopting (MacInnes, 1998: 144).

Work on emotions with boys is congruent with early feminist ‘consciousness raising’ where feelings were seen as a guide to knowledge about the world: ‘emotions were seen as links between inner truth or inner self and the outer world - including ideology, culture, and other discourses of power’ (Weiler, 1991: 141). Feminists also criticised emotional work. Hochschild (1983) argues that while emotions are a means by which we know about our relation to the world, at the same time emotions themselves are manipulated and constructed (*Ibid*: 219). An example of this is the suggestion that anger and ‘feeling hurt’ might actually be the same physical sensation, and that men are taught to identify the sensation as ‘anger’ and women as ‘hurt’. The expression of strong emotion can be simply cathartic and deflect the need for action to address the underlying causes of that emotion. However, there is no reason why some of these issues about ‘emotional work’ could not themselves be the basis of discussion with boys.

Teaching SfL to boys in WBS stemmed from the belief that exploring experiences and feelings in the classroom can contribute to cohesion and collaboration in the class, a reduction of behaviour problems, and thus affect achievement. Young people, increasingly appear to experience a variety of emotions and behaviours that are distressing (see Appendix 2, pages 245-247 for information about emotional health), and interfere with ability to study. MacInnes’ view, therefore, that emotional work is a ‘voyeuristic invasion of private space by weak selves without the capacity to be alone’ (MacInnes, 1998: 144) is perhaps extreme. Nor can it be correct that such work is ‘anti-sexist’ or a specific strategy for a policy focused on boys, *unless* it includes discussion with young people on the social construction of emotion. Emotional work should not be viewed as a strategy in gender work, but might be useful for all young people as a strategy to address their distress.

5.5 Reforming boys

This strategy relates to facilitating opportunities for boys to discuss issues relating to social power. Its main purpose is to change boys themselves (in which case it has much in common with the ‘anti-sexist’ approach of SfL) or empower boys to make changes in their environment (in which case it is aligned with political education). It may teach *about* gender ideologies and their effects or stress a self-reflexive and awareness raising approach exploring how as individuals we have been shaped *through* ideology. For example, McLean (1995) suggests strategies that involve finding ways of honouring boys’ resistance to the many injustices they experience, at the same time as helping them make a stand against the injustices they have inflicted on others. Group work with boys, he suggests, needs to start by getting to know them,

finding out about the struggles they have in their lives, their hopes and fears before bringing the discussion round to equity issues where and when appropriate:

It is important to keep in mind, however, that the fundamental issue is gender justice, not men's experience, and this involves women as well as men. ...I certainly believe that there is an important place for gender based programs for boys in schools, but such programs have little chance of success unless they are part of a broadly based attempt to deal with the realities of students lives and the society in which they find themselves (McLean, 1995: 41)

This approach is the same as that taken in SfL: it links emotional work with boys with 'anti-sexist' goals:

If mutual understanding and tolerance between the sexes are to be achieved, we must help boys develop the skills of co-operation, communication and tolerance. Boys need to learn that harassment and violence (aimed at girls and/or other boys) are unacceptable. Boys should be encouraged to discuss their own values and how they affect relationships with each other, and with the women in their various communities (family, work, and society) (O'Doherty, 1994: 10).

An approach to boys' work in school that stresses raising awareness and understanding of power structures is rare (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998). I have not been able to find examples in the media, or in current UK government or LEA policy documents. In an Australian survey of gender related strategies used in schools, 'critical analysis of practices and contexts which limit educational and life possibilities on the basis of gender' was the second lowest frequency of use (Collins *et al*, 1996). The O'Doherty report to the New South Wales Minister of Education recommends a combination of strategies that might fall under the 'emotional work' approach discussed above, but also includes a more political approach:

- the construction of gender; what it is to be 'male' or 'female' in our society, including different types of masculinity and femininity
- living as part of a community; how relationships are affected by gender issues
- relationships in families and in the community
- gender stereotypes; their effect on attitudes and behaviour
- media images of men and women and their impact
- peer group pressure
- self-image and the development of self-esteem
- the nature of power in relationships and in society; the abuse of power through sex-based harassment (same sex and other-sex harassment), bullying and violence
- conflict resolution techniques
- understanding the opposite sex, including the impact our behaviour can have on others
- the things we value in relating to each other and in living as part of our various communities – family, school, our neighbourhood, the workplace
- the things we value from individuals around us, male and female, and the ways these may run counter to predominant gender stereotypes (O'Doherty, 1994: 31-2).

An 'anti-sexist' approach is criticised by MacInnes (1998: 143-144) because

... to imagine that we might thus create egalitarian gender identities is not only misconceived but also profoundly conservative. It puts the cart of identity before the horse of the existing sexual division of labour.

From this perspective the problem is not the boys, but the ways in which gender, race, class and sexuality dynamics are organised in our society (Denborough, 1996). Further problems, as found in SfL in WBS, include that:

- boys may be overwhelmed by guilt and turn away (Connell, 1994)
- peer relations are more important than adult relations and apparent criticism of their culture will not be easily accepted (Kenway and Fitzclarence, 1997).

5.6 Reconceptualising schooling

From this perspective, 'educational inequality between males, as well as between males and females, is not an aberration, but an integral part of the system' (McLean, 1995: 34).

McLean claims that from the beginning of compulsory mass education in the late nineteenth century schools were designed to protect the power and privileges of the upper and middle classes and reproduce class-based inequality. The school curriculum can be seen as middle-class knowledge being imposed on often actively resisting students, whose resistance is interpreted as 'misbehaviour' or 'stupidity' (McLean, 1985). Historically schools have reproduced class privilege and academic success:

Schools are set up to 'sort and sift', to give elite training to the children of the rich, to prepare others for the assembly line, and to legitimate the results. That is why we have a testing program, selective promotion to the upper levels of education, privileged private schools, and so on. To produce educational inequality is the proper business of schools performing their function of reproducing an unequal social order (Connell *et al* 1982: 189-90).

The ideology of 'equal opportunity' in education systems is seen by some to hide entrenched and unchanged structural inequalities (McLean, 1995), and the organisation of education in terms of individual competition operates to hide these inequalities:

Our society has been convinced that success at school is primarily to do with individual intelligence and diligence, rather than class, gender or race-based access to power, privilege and resources. Boys from private and academically-oriented state schools have always done well and continue to do so. It is only now, when girls are seen as a real threat to the job prospects of privileged boys, that working-class boys are marshalled on behalf of men as a whole (McLean, 1994: 34).

Socio-economic and cultural background is hugely influential in determining boys' experience of gender and power within school, and their resulting behaviour. Competitive abilities provide middle and upper class boys with a direct path into the adult male world of the professions and business. The reality is quite different, however, for working class children. For working class pupils, school represents a hostile, class-based authority, and together with lack of jobs,

individual competition, and a curriculum based on middle-class knowledge, this inevitably results in failure (Dench, 1996a, 1996b).

‘Reconceptualising schooling’ involves making fundamental changes to pedagogy, curriculum content, examination processes and hidden curriculum to make schools more just and equitable places for all pupils. Unsurprisingly, it is not a solution suggested by either the media or in public policy documents. Raphael Reed (1999: 97) writes: ‘a narrow focus on measurable outcomes inadequately captures the complexity of gender issues in education, and....a broader concern with the “hidden” curriculum” and social process of schooling should remain a key priority’.

Crucially, as Petersen (1998) points out, popular strategies, like those proposed by the media and the ‘Reaffirming the boys’ approach, are based on essentialist and universalist ideas about men. They offer single messages to mass audiences and both reflect and generate cultural knowledge about ‘masculinity’. Petersen suggests that popular strategies have been overlooked by more critical studies as a source of insight into the operations of the epistemology of masculinity (why some questions are asked and not others). Sheurich (1997: 102) reminds us that a poststructuralist, archaeological study of policy solutions, is concerned with questions about how the range of possible policy solutions is socially constructed from what he calls the ‘grid of social regularities’. In other words, why these solutions and not others? He notes that popular solutions at any time will be congruent with the dominant social order:

Policy solutions which contradict or question that order do not emerge or, when they do emerge among the socially marginalized, do not achieve any credibility among the governmental and policy agents who serve as the legitimacy gatekeepers of the policy discourse (Ibid: 110).

It is worth noting that all the solutions being proposed by individual schools, LEAs, the media and at government level do not question the purposes of schooling or its organisation. The dominant solutions fulfil the same purpose as the discourse on masculinity and male ‘crisis’ more generally; they detract attention away from broader problems in the social order itself, including changing patterns of employment, economic organisation, and existential anxiety, and from questions about the purpose of education or the values underpinning the obsession with testing and league tables (chapter eight). During a time of rapid change and uncertainty these solutions make us feel better because ‘something is being done’ (see chapter seven).

The next chapter examines women teachers’ discourses about boys in boys’ schools and is concerned with the extent to which they are the same as, or different from discourses identified in the 1980s, as well as those highlighted in this chapter in the media and public policy.

Chapter Six: Twenty years On: Women teachers' constructions of problems relating to boys, boys' schools and solutions in the 2000s.

6.1 Introduction

In 2003 I interviewed 16 women teachers in boys' schools in the same LEA where my previous action research was conducted 20 years earlier, with the aim of examining how women teachers talk about and understand boys and boys' schools in the early 2000s, and their constructions of solutions to any problems they identify³⁶. I was interested to discover whether women teachers described different behaviour to that described in the 1980s; whether women teachers described similar behaviour to that described in the 1980s, but talked about it differently; or alternatively, whether teachers described the same behaviour and talked about it in the same way. If different discourses are used it may be *because* boys and boys' schools are different from before, or that boys' schools are different from each other. For example, they may have changed because of feminism, and benefited from education about sexism. Alternatively, if different discourses are used, it may be that boys are behaving the same, but that women teachers perceive them differently. The goal of this research was not to find evidence of boys' 'real' behaviour, but to analyse contemporary discourses about them. Therefore the research design did not include an intention to observe boys' behaviour in schools. However, there is some evidence to suggest that where behaviour is disruptive, it tends to be boys who are doing the disruption. Two undercover television programmes, 'Classroom Chaos' (Hill, 2005) and 'Dispatches: undercover teacher' (Channel 4, 2005) describe the experience of supply teachers who spent six months in state schools across the country using hidden cameras to film behaviour. The behaviours recorded included:

- a classroom being vandalised during a break time, with windows smashed and glass thrown around the room, books destroyed and desks overturned
- 'pupils' openly using mobile phones to download pornography, accessing obscene websites on school computers and making 'serious sexual suggestions'
- a 'pupil' accusing the supply teacher of hitting him, and threatening to report her to the police and sue her
- the supply teacher having to stand by the classroom door to prevent students walking out
- 'pupils' fighting

³⁶ A search of the British Education Index of 'women teachers' experiences', identified 277 articles written between 1976-2005, only one of which is specifically about women teachers' experiences in boys' schools (Bailey, 1996) (the majority focused on women in management, and several were about staff sex imbalances in

- ‘pupils’ running on top of desks, and jumping from one desk to another
- ‘pupils’ swearing at the teacher³⁷.

According to Hill (2005: 7) in ‘Classroom Chaos’ the schools were chosen randomly by the supply teaching agencies, and ‘most had been identified by Ofsted as being average or better than average’. However, in the Dispatches programme it was clear that the schools filmed were in Inner City deprived areas and were struggling. These behaviours, consequently, are unlikely to be representative of the behaviours of the majority of pupils in the majority of schools, and may not be representative of the schools in which they were filmed. From the point of view of this thesis what is interesting is that the teachers, programme makers and journalist do not highlight the fact that most pupils who are misbehaving are boys. Significantly, the words ‘boys’, ‘boy’ and ‘he’ or ‘him’ are only used in passing in the television programmes. For example, the teacher repeatedly is heard to say, ‘boys stop that’ or just ‘boys!’ ‘Sexism’, ‘masculinity’ and ‘sexual harassment’ are not mentioned. It is noteworthy that instead pupils make ‘serious sexual suggestions’. This implies that the female teacher is not constructing herself as a ‘victim’ of harassment. My research with women teachers is concerned with how they perceive themselves, as well as the boys they teach.

My aim in interviewing women teachers in boys’ schools is to examine:

- how they perceive boys; boys’ behaviour; their approach to learning and boys’ schools
- how they perceive themselves in relation to the boys they teach
- whether they identify specific strategies for addressing any perceived problems relating to boys, and if so what these are
- explanations for any perceived differences between boys and girls and for any strategies suggested or used
- whether discourses of women teachers in the early 2000s are the same as those of women teachers in the 1980s, and if different how they relate to contemporary theoretical and media discourse.

As explored in chapter three, analysis of data collected in the 1980s resulted in identification of the following discourses used by women teachers and academics about boys and boys’ schools:

primary schools). Two of the abstracts specifically mention women teachers’ experiences of sexual harassment or sexism (Priegert Coulter, 1995; Bailey, 1996).

³⁷ I observed all but the second and third of these behaviours in boys’ schools in the 1980s.

- a. 'Boys are sexist'
 - 'Boys behave aggressively to one another'
 - 'Boys take up too much space'
 - 'Boys harass girls and women in school'
- b. 'Sexism affects boys' learning and achievement'
 - 'Boys have poor learning skills'
 - 'Boys are competitive and have few group work skills'
 - 'Boys prefer 'doing' to talking'
- c. 'Schools are sexist'
 - 'The school ethos is masculine'
 - 'There is less emphasis on relationships and more on control'
 - 'Male teachers are sexist'

And the following construction of solutions to the 'problems':

- equal opportunity and anti-sexist work in boys' schools
- developing a new 'anti-sexist' curriculum and resources
- INSET about sexism in boys' schools and developing anti-sexist policies
- women's groups in both co-educational and boys' schools
- commitment to co-educational schools.

Interviews will be analysed to see whether any of the above discourses are still used. This chapter, like chapter three, is not concerned with providing 'evidence' about what boys are like or not like, or what schools are like or not like. Discourse analysis is used to highlight what is said, what is not said, and the language used to say it.

Four schools in the same LEA as in the 1980s were contacted. All these schools are in a large inner city and were chosen on the basis that they were different in several respects. Edgerton³⁸ is a technology college in a deprived area with a low 'ability' intake; Thomas Baker, a former grammar school in a fairly mixed, but predominantly middle class area, with a mix of 'abilities'; St. Francis, a catholic school with a high 'ability' intake; and Cliff Edge, an ethnically and socially diverse school with a balanced intake in terms of 'ability' (further information about the schools is in Appendix 10). Edgerton, Thomas Baker, and Cliff Edge were involved in the action research in the 1980s (many of the original schools in this LEA have since closed or become mixed). In each case a written request was made to the Head for permission to approach a senior woman teacher in the school for an interview. Subsequently, this teacher introduced me to other colleagues. Four women in each school were individually interviewed using an unstructured interview technique (see Appendix 11 for the areas covered, and for a profile of each woman teacher). Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. Analysis of the interviews focuses on how women teachers talk about, and understand their experience of teaching boys and working in boys' schools in the early 2000s, and the extent to which discourses used by women parallel the discourses identified in chapter three.

38 All names of schools and teachers have been replaced with pseudonyms

All interviews were transcribed. Each interview was read several times and coded in relation to the discourses identified above. All 'speech acts' relating to the 1980s discourses were organised together, including any speech that disconfirmed the earlier discourse. All ways of talking about and understanding boys were incorporated and no other 'speech acts' were discarded. None of the ways that solutions were constructed in the 1980s were found in the 2000s. Interviews were separately coded for any solutions offered for perceived 'problems'.

6.2 Analysis of women's talk and understanding of boys and boys' schools in the 2000s

a. 'Boys are sexist'

In chapter three I highlighted that in the 1980s women teachers' discourses about boys focused on their behaviour, which was perceived as a problem. It seemed that women understood boys both as abusive and abused: on the one hand they talked about boys as sexist, on the other they were aware of different ways in which boys were oppressed themselves. It appeared from interviews with women teachers in the 2000s that boys are not seen as abusive. The word 'sexist' or 'sexism' was only used three times (twice by the same woman), and only once in relation to boys' behaviour (page 124). All but two of the women talked about how much they liked the boys, and liked teaching in a boys' school. For example (all emphases are mine):

I like working with boys. On the whole they are quite *straightforward* – you tell a boy off and they don't tend to hold it against you. *They don't hold grudges*. I think girls can be more sensitive, perhaps *take things more personally*. You have to be a bit *more careful*. On the other hand they may not cause as many problems. Boys are more low key. Boys bounce back. It's not that difficult with an aggressive boy, because all you have to do is not be aggressive back. (Fay, St. Francis)

That's one of the things that I love about this school. I love the kids who come here. I prefer it. I was very happy at the girls' school but I enjoy working with boys because although girls are more passive and generally easier to teach, I think the boys, when you can get them going, have a wonderful enthusiasm. (Connie, Cliff Edge)

I like their energy. I like the fact that they are *straightforward*. I like the fact that you set out the boundaries and once you build up trust with them...*they don't bear grudges*. You can say to them "I've made a mistake" and they'll accept that. If you make a mistake with girls they really hold it against you. *It's not so personal* in the way girls can be. (Tessa, Thomas Baker)

Because puberty happens earlier and its impact might be more severe, I was much *more careful with teenage girls*. I wanted to resist that idea when I first came but I think it's true. You can cock up with boys, you can make mistakes and they are forgotten quite quickly. With girls you make an enemy and that's it. *Boys don't hold grudges*, I think most teachers in the school would say that. (Cass, Cliff Edge)

The perception that women teachers have to be 'more careful' around girls is striking. There is an implication that boys are perhaps more 'robust'. They are certainly seen as less complicated: five women teachers in these interviews talked about boys being more 'straightforward', and three mentioned that boys 'don't bear grudges'. Boys are perceived as not taking things as personally as girls do. 'Straightforward' implies that boys are direct, free from deceit; they

proceed without circuitry. Because boys are constructed in relation to girls, by implication girls are 'roundabout': devious, tricky, deceptive, and sly. They build resentment about some real or imagined wrong.

These are not ways of talking about and understanding boys or girls in the feminist literature of the 1980s or my research at the time. Boys 'like boundaries', they 'bounce back', are 'more low key', 'enthusiastic', have 'energy'. In contrast there is an understanding that girls can be more sensitive, and 'hold on' to perceived injustice or failure - boys let it go and move on. Girls are also seen as 'more passive' and are 'easier to teach'. These understandings contrast with Wilce's (2003) assertion (page 98) that boys are more fragile than girls and 'require a higher standard of teaching'.

Four teachers constructed boys as 'respectful', and having a sense of fair play:

They are very respectful. They have very clear ideas of justice and order. They like clear boundaries and they have to be enforced. (Thelma, Thomas Baker)

I like the way they behave to women teachers. There's a lot of respect (Freda, St. Francis)

This is a positive construction of boys – women perceive a kind of transparency about boys that they value. Several teachers talk about boys being *young*. Boys are children, women teachers are the adults and they are in charge:

"He did this and he did that. It's outrageous". Well actually, No, it's not outrageous. He's 13 and it's not that outrageous. You don't ignore certain behaviours, but you just need to understand them better. I think that would be a good point to start with. (Cynthia, Cliff Edge)

In chapter three I pointed out that women teachers appeared to perceive boys as, in some sense, having more power than they did in the 1980s, whereas in the discourse above women teachers see themselves as being in charge of the boys. Only Emily and Elizabeth in Edgerton, the biggest school, with many children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and in the most deprived area, talked about not enjoying teaching boys:

I find it very stressful teaching here. I like the boys on an individual basis, but in groups they can be horrendous. I don't like the school and I'm leaving in summer. (Emily, Edgerton)

Elizabeth had previously taught in a primary school and found the contrast unwelcome:

I've had enough of teaching boys. It's exhausting and very demanding. It doesn't allow for any learning. I'm leaving education. (Elizabeth, Edgerton)

Although Emily and Elizabeth have 'had enough of teaching boys' they, as all the women, *like* the boys. Both teachers above find the experience of teaching boys' in a group 'stressful', or 'exhausting' and 'demanding' and they, like all the women, find the experience of teaching in a

boy-only school very different from teaching in a mixed or girl-only school.

‘Boys behave aggressively toward each other’ and ‘Boys take up too much space’

Asked about the boys’ behaviour toward one another, only one teacher mentioned ‘aggression’ and this, she said was infrequent:

The kids are challenging, you have to work hard with them. I would say there is a very small minority who are nasty or aggressive. I found P (former boys’ school) particularly difficult because the kids were very aggressive, but it’s not like that here. There is some bullying, but they get on very well. I’m very close to them and they know what I will and won’t tolerate, so I don’t know how limited what I see from them is. I don’t go into the playground particularly so I don’t know what goes on there. Boys sort of blow up sometimes. You learn how to deal quickly with soothing a situation that may be confrontational. You never shout at a boy in front of his peers, because they are much more about losing face – they’ll react really badly to that - it’s a fatal mistake to make. Boys are much more easily *humiliated*. Girls will be chagrined quite quickly if you yell at them. (Tessa, Thomas Baker)

In this quote Tessa expands on her understanding (previous page) that ‘boys don’t bear grudges’ by talking about her perception that girls and boys respond differently to being shouted at. Boys ‘lose face’, are ‘humiliated’, while it seems that girls will accept the shouting and respond as demanded.

Nine of the teachers talked about boys being ‘physical’. These ways of understanding are similar to discourses found in the 1980s:

They are very *physical*. There has to be a dominant member and a hierarchy within the group. That is often determined by physical strength or being the top dog, the one who will have the say. All the time *play fighting*, pushing, shoving. (Elizabeth, Edgerton)

There’s a lot of farting, squabbling, punching in corridors. It’s quite *physical* their behaviour toward each other. Name calling, cussing, insults, comments on appearance. We have very few fights, but they’re quite *boisterous* en masse. (Fay, St. Francis)

Just all the time, constant hitting each other and being *physical*, which you don’t get in a mixed school. It’s more verbal in mixed schools. (Tamsin, Thomas Baker)

Physical, of course, pertains to the body, as distinct from the mind, and relates to energy and strength. I was struck by the use of the term ‘play fighting’ or description of fights as ‘playful’. This fits with the idea that boys are ‘boisterous’ and suggests that this is normal male behaviour, which need be of no concern. In contrast this understanding of fighting being fun did not pervade the feminist analysis of boys’ fighting in the 1980s. Askew and Ross (1988a: 10) write that whether or not fighting is ‘fun’ is rather besides the point ‘If we accept that much of children’s play is a copy and a practice of adult roles, then this kind of play is worrying’. Askew and Ross (1988a) pointed out that most violence in society is carried out by males (see Appendix 2 for statistics on violence).

The discourse of male ‘physicality’ is consistent across three of the schools. No one offered an

explanation about why boys are *more* 'physical' than girls, or (in some cases) in a boys' school. Teachers in Cliff Edge, in contrast, did not remark on boys' being very 'physical', apart from Cass who said the boys 'were quick to respond' to incidents:

They are quite quick to respond to an incident somewhere else. I don't think it happens so much in the classroom. Maybe in the corridor, but it's generally *playful*. We do have some real fights of course. (Cass, Cliff Edge)

All the teachers commented on constant noise and frequent, minor incidents that were often described as boys being 'obsessed with one-another'. The perception that boys take up more space, also reported in the 1980s was found here:

You notice the noise. You notice the way they move around. You notice their obsession with *play fighting* – pushing, poking, hitting, cussing. It's quite funny to see it sometimes. You'll be in a lesson and you look round and somebody has rolled their sleeves up to compare muscle tone. (Toni, Thomas Baker)

You've got to watch out or the boys almost fly into you. Thumping each other. Jumping out of their chairs. They can already be in the classroom before you. That's very difficult. *They take up so much space*, they've got their legs everywhere. You are interrupting them, rather than them coming into your environment. (Emily, Edgerton)

Eight teachers mentioned that they thought boys were less mature than girls they had taught previously. In this discourse girls are sensible, mature, calm and rather serious individuals. For example:

They are much *more immature and silly* than in a mixed school because the girls wouldn't let them. Things you would expect of much younger boys you get in sixth form classes here, like farting. It's the little games they play with each other, how they react if you mention certain things like homosexuality, or sex. (Freda, St. Francis)

I'd say that they are *less mature* than in a mixed school. The emphasis on bodily function that you see adopted by year 9, 10 and 11 here. I find their behaviour *very silly*. They are obsessed with farting. You're just not used to it. The girls would be so disdainful. I find awful the need to put each other down, to cuss, to badmouth or to ridicule. (Thelma, Thomas Baker)

Boys are 'silly', they behave like young children, they are 'obsessed with farting'. However, they sound humorous, they are playful, they joke around, they enjoy themselves. There is little condemnation of their behaviour, although Thelma 'finds awful' their ridicule and cussing of one another.

Seven of the teachers also talked about prevalent use of insulting language, usually relating to being 'gay', and occasional insults relating to 'Your mum':

There's a lot of homophobic abuse like "batty boy" to any boy who doesn't fit the masculine stereotype, for example, if he's not into football, "You're such a girl". "You're so gay". (Fran, St. Francis)

Yes there's cussing, racism, homophobia, the usual – gay man/batty man. 'Your mum'. There's a boy in the class who hates anyone different from him – Jamaicans, the female support teacher. We are reading a book and discovered one of the characters is gay. His partner is in hospital dying with AIDS. The boy was quite thoughtful about it because it was presented in a serious way. It's something they fall into when they don't know much about things - there's a lot of ignorance around. (Eileen, Edgerton)

The favourite phrase is "You're Gay" Everything's gay. Or "That answer is gay". It has its own sort of definitive role this word. In my last school we did have pupils that were openly gay. I've never heard of that here. Here there is that all boys' insecurity about sexuality. The constant thing in the fourth year is "Miss can you tell so and so off. He's touching my leg. He fancies me." (Thelma, Thomas Baker)

These descriptions draw on 'homophobia' and 'racism' as explanations for the insults. I noticed that when describing comments about females, e.g. 'you're a girl' or 'something about 'your mum' the word 'sexist' was not used.

In this discourse, there is no 'blame' attached to the boys for their immaturity or general behaviour. Blame, if it is attached to the behaviour at all, is related to the social context, either on the streets, at home or in school:

I think generally behaviour on the street, the environment has degenerated over the last 20 years. That inevitably comes into the classroom and makes classroom management more difficult. There's lots of kids who don't have boundaries at home. So getting them to behave appropriately inside the school is difficult. (Tessa, Thomas Baker)

Some of the physical stuff is because everyone is down on them and they take it out on each other. It's not a particularly nice environment, some of the classrooms are awful. A lot of the time their regular teacher is away and they get supply teachers. It's not surprising that they're frustrated and angry. (Eileen, Edgerton)

Others explained 'bad' behaviour, including racism, as stemming from 'ignorance', and in the case of one teacher below, from poor role models in this particular school:

It's to do with ignorance, but also staff will talk about boys in particular ways, particularly PE staff. Things like boys being queer. Or they'll mimic a feminine hand movement in relation to a particular boy. (Freda, St. Francis)

Six teachers also talked about another side of the boys, a side that was caring, supportive:

Our boys can be incredibly mature when put in situations where they have to be. Last year one of our boys and a teacher died tragically, and the boys were stunning. Absolutely no immaturity. Completely focused on how they were expected to be. Same if you see them on open evenings. If you take them out they're very good. It's when they are together with their peers. (Freda, St. Francis)

They don't mind crying in front of each other. They're very supportive of each other. (Tessa, Thomas Baker)

I watch them in the corridors and playground. They're quite protective of each other and will jump to each other's defence in the face of what they think is a teacher being unfair. My experience of girls is a bit more 'each to their own'. They'll let other girls sort themselves out. (Cass, Cliff Edge)

Boys stick up for one another, they 'protect' one another. When on their own, or in a situation that demands it, boys are 'stunning'. Boys' immaturity is not perceived as consistent – they are different in different situations. Girls, on the other hand, apparently leave one another to sort out their problems with teachers on their own. They seemingly are less loyal friends. This is an unexpected discourse. It reminds me that the radical feminist discourse of the 1980s, while encouraging a more critical appraisal of male behaviour, also encouraged a 'sisterly' and less critical appraisal of female.

'Boys harass girls and women in school'

Although two of the boys' schools were part of a mixed sixth form consortium (Thomas Baker and Cliff Edge), there was no mention of girls complaining of being sexually harassed by boys. No women in the study used the words 'sexual harassment' when asked about her experiences in a boys' school. When asked directly, only one of the 16 women reported that she had been sexually harassed.

I have been sexually harassed. I've had boys' touching me on the bum and breasts and when I've gone to senior management for help I don't feel I've been supported. Nothing's really happened and it's still continuing. (Emily, Edgerton)

Elizabeth, who 'had enough of teaching boys', said that in the school there was sexual harassment of other women:

We've had phases of the boys sexually touching up female members of staff, which I don't think would happen in a mixed school. It's across the board, women of all ages and ethnicity. (Elizabeth, Edgerton)

Six other women interviewed in 2003 talked about being aware of occasional and 'low level' sexual harassment of women staff in the school, although it had not affected them personally:

Younger, more attractive teachers sometimes have to put up with comments and there was one boy who touched a teacher's bum last year. I'm not sure how much he knew what he was doing because he was one of our special needs boys. Of course he got excluded for a while till he got it explained to him. They will try and wind women teachers up. If they are found making comments then the leadership will come down hard on them because it goes against the ethos, respect for women and that sort of thing. (Freda, St. Francis)

I'm the Union rep and in 2 years I've been aware of one incident. I would say there is low-level stuff, which is mainly confined to student teachers, new and supply teachers. I think one teacher had quite a lot of sexual harassment in her first year because the boys perceived her as a sex object. The boys behaved in her classroom because they found her attractive. They wanted to be liked by her. (Caroline, Cliff Edge)

Caroline's explanation for sexual harassment is unusual. She seems to be saying here that the boys sexually harassed their teacher because they *liked* her, and wanted to be liked in return by

her; she perceives sexual harassment as a strategy used by boys to build a relationship with the teacher. The notion that harassment is related to 'power over' is lacking in Caroline's and other women's understanding, in contrast to the 1980s discourse. Four other teachers talked about boys sometimes acting out, writing, drawing, or making comments relating to sex in front of them:

The favourite one "Could you tell so and so off because he's put a pubic hair on my desk". I just said, "Would you take it to show your year master. Such a delicate matter would need to be dealt with by him". Generally anything they are drawing which is untoward I wouldn't even look at. I rip it up and put it in the bin. At the moment there's the looking up and down slowly to see what you're wearing that day, and saying something to the boy next to them. That's so funny, because that hasn't happened to me since I first went to teach at SM (previous school). I'm aware of it but it doesn't bother me. (Thelma, Thomas Baker)

I've noticed with young women coming into the school, there's definitely a reaction, and the younger and prettier you are the more difficult it can be at the beginning. They accept the strong, male role model as the norm, and when they are faced with something different they don't really know how to deal with it. You get a noise, or they stop talking, or there's a comment. When I first came it took me a while to notice those issues. Because I was married I think that made a difference. (Fay, St. Francis)

Boys' will make gestures when women walk down the corridor – to do with their physical shape. If you pick them up on it they don't want to tell you what they have been doing because they find it embarrassing. You don't know what goes on behind your back but it's not a major problem for me. (Ellen, Edgerton)

We go to the computer room a lot and they are often looking on the FHM websites for beautiful women. They can get downloads of whatever they want. I've also seen sexual graffiti in their books. Loads of times. They draw on each other's books to wind each other up. (Emily, Edgerton)

Tamsin also said that boys in class sometimes sat masturbating, behaviour also reported by two other women in previous schools where they had worked:

There's one boy in year 10 who sits there with his hands down his trousers who won't do up his zip. It's even got to the stage where in the class I say "will you do your trousers up". They need to be taught social skills about how to get on in the outside world. (Tamsin, Thomas Baker)

Tamsin constructed this behaviour as lack of appropriate social skills, rather than as behaviour specifically aimed at her. Because of her interpretation, she has no need to feel offended. Three of the teachers had neither personal experience, nor heard of sexual harassment of other women staff in the school.

Four women in this study perceived that women who are sexually harassed behave inappropriately:

I find them very respectful. They're noisy, they don't always listen, but they're not rude. I think they're quite biddable. Many of them come from a culture of respect for older

people. I'm in my 50s so I'm less likely to be harassed but also my boundaries are clear. There's one young woman in my department who has major harassment problems, however you can't help thinking that her boundaries are unclear. *She doesn't seem to have much awareness of what is appropriate* in how she talks to them and so it's difficult to deal with. I've asked her to get some help and tried talking to her, and I've asked senior management to deal with it. I think she needs counselling. (Eileen, Edgerton)

There's a lot of respect for women teachers. I have a very high regard for the way the boys treat female members of staff. There are a few exceptions where they've made *sexist* comments about young female teachers. That's very unusual. *I suspect the teachers have invited it.* (Connie, Cliff Edge)

One teacher shows her boobs and belly. Boys have made comments about her in my hearing. "Did you see what she was wearing today"? They're embarrassed. *She is being inappropriate.* This is affecting respectable relationships between the women staff and boys. The worse up until then was graffiti on desks, which could be sexual. (Fran, St. Francis)

In this discourse boys are 'respectful'. Sexual harassment is something that happens to 'younger' or 'more attractive' teachers and they are constructed as being 'inappropriate' or having unclear boundaries.

Three further teachers suggested that behaviour that is sometimes called 'sexual harassment' may be something entirely different:

No I have not experienced sexual harassment. I've had boys make inappropriate comments – not often, but I don't feel intimidated. I think that's because I accept that they're at an awkward stage. They're trying things out. Their sexuality is developing and we spend a lot of time with them. I've never felt that because it's a boy I can't deal with it. I haven't had any personal issues with boys. I have two sons. I'm an adult. I work in a school with children. Children who are becoming young men. (Cynthia, Cliff Edge)

I have heard one or two teachers say that, but when they describe the situation I would not describe that as sexual harassment. There's definitely a different attitude from some of the pupils towards female teachers. That's inevitable because they will be taught different lessons and values at home. (Faith, St. Francis)

I really don't know of any incidents, which I would call sexual harassment. I think some of the people who call things sexual harassment have their own hang-ups and problems. (Tessa, Thomas Baker)

This discourse appears to suggest that women teachers are misguided if they think that sexual harassment is occurring, and seems to suggest that women teachers need to perceive the behaviour differently.

While boys' sexual behaviour was talked about as a problem by only one of the women in the research, seven teachers did talk about how being a woman affected the boys' perceptions of them, and in turn, their perceptions of the boys:

I think it's a certain type of woman who sticks working in a boys' school. It involves adopting what society sees as some masculine characteristics. When I came here I had to fight for my status as an intellectual. You could see the perceptions of some of the

brightest boys in the class about me— partly about class because of my accent, but partly about being a woman. I also think the mother/whore dichotomy comes into play. That's a crude way of putting it because it's a bit more sophisticated than that. (Caroline, Cliff Edge)

The boys sometimes consciously, mainly subconsciously divide the women in the school into the young sexually attractive ones, and the mother figures to an extent. They relate to me in the same way as their mother. For example I said to F in my tutor group one day "I'm fed up with having to ask you to do everything 3 times". His response was "My mother always asks me to do things 3 times." (Faith, St. Francis)

We mother the boys – tidy them up, get them there on time. (Freda, St. Francis)

Again, while women describe how teaching in a boys' school affects them, and how they might replicate mother-son relationships with students, this is not described as problematic. Caroline talked about a mother/whore dichotomy in which young 'sexually attractive' women are identified as the whores. In the 1980s this mother-whore identification would have been described as sexist. There are a number of other discourses here that are different from those found in the early 1980s. One understanding of sexual harassment is that it is something that might 'happen' to young, new or inexperienced teachers who are found sexually attractive. The discourse in the 1980s did not focus on 'sexual attractiveness'. Rather it focused on *power relations*. A second striking difference is that the women do not take it seriously, they find it 'funny', it's 'just to see the teacher's reaction', it doesn't 'bother' them, they can deal with it, boys are 'exploring their sexuality'. Women teachers do not see it as a problem. On the contrary, there is some suggestion that the problem is the women who claim to be harassed, they have their 'hang-ups' or their boundaries are unclear. In keeping with a poststructuralist perspective, I do not intend arguing that sexual harassment either is, or is not a problem, either exists or does not exist, or that either women or boys are to 'blame' if it does exist. I am interested in examining the discourse of sexual harassment as an example of how discourses change, the context for this change, and how this affects what becomes identified as a problem. I reported in chapter three that in the 1980s there was briefly some talk and attempt to understand sexual harassment as a problem of masculinity. On page 58 of this thesis I conveyed Askew and Ross' (1988a) concerns about the fact that sexual harassment was often considered 'harmless' 'innocent' or 'natural' and that women had difficulty in it being taken seriously, except in its most brutal forms³⁹. Clearly, women teachers' contemporary discourse about boys does not problematise masculinity. This seems a clear example of how discourse affects perception of situations, and in turn experience and solutions. There were no suggestions from any women that intervention in any school was required to address harassment, boys' relationships with women, or any aspect of 'masculinity', as was the

39 For example, the rape of a woman teacher in a boys' school in Inner London on the first day of term in September 2004 resulted in a life sentence for the 15-year-old perpetrator of this crime (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/4649631.stm>) (accessed July 8th 2005).

case in the 1980s⁴⁰.

b. 'Sexism affects boys' learning and achievement'

'Boys have poor learning skills'

Several teachers who had previously taught in mixed schools perceived differences between boys' and girls' approaches to learning. Many of the approaches ascribed to boys were qualities that would normally be perceived as negative: for example, they look for short cuts, they are not independent learners, they do not listen, they are immature, they blame others for lack of success, they give up easily, they need faster results, they like to be spoon-fed, and like rote learning. However, they are also 'curious', 'lively', 'like a challenge', are 'motivated', and 'hard working'. None of the teachers interviewed made any links between these observations and 'sexism' or 'masculinity'. Six teachers talked about their surprise at finding boys not taking responsibility for their class work in years 11, 12 and 13:

A lot of them look for short cuts. They are quite pragmatic about their learning. A lot of them are ambitious, but you find boys who aren't putting any effort in to the last minute. There's a lot of overdependence on you – miss why haven't you done this or that, rather than "what can I do". On the other hand you do get quite a lot of boys with natural curiosity. They're quite lively in the way they approach things and interested – they like a challenge. (Faith, St. Francis)

They like to be fed. They like everything done for them. More than girls. Even the sixth formers aren't very good at things like taking their own notes. They like rote learning. (Freda, St. Francis)

You have classes where you come out and think "I can't believe I just taught sixth formers". They tend to sit back and say, "Well, I couldn't do that because you didn't give me the piece of paper. I *think* I was away that day." It's always someone else's fault. I would say there are a number of them that can't cope with responsibility. (Tamsin, Thomas Baker)

Several women perceived boys making less effort with their work than girls. They appeared to be satisfied if they had done the minimum: consequently, the standard of their work was lower than that of girls:

Their ability to express themselves is poor. They like to give the bare facts when writing. For example, in geography they'll say 'a cave is caused by waves'. It's very hard to get them to explain in detail how this happens. You have to pull it out. They don't care as much about how work is presented. Some do. They think if they've written what you want, how it's written shouldn't matter. (Fran, St. Francis).

In the sixth form there's no evidence of independent research. If you set work they want to know what page, what paragraph. They need to be spoon-fed. The standard of writing

40 However, there also seems to be some evidence that the level of sexual harassment varies from school to school. This might be an interesting focus for future research.

is appalling. They don't read apart from advertisements in magazines. They can't construct a paragraph. (Fay, St. Francis)

The women below also suggested that in addition to needing to be spoon-fed, boys were not as determined to succeed as girls, they are more complacent:

The boys found it difficult sometimes when the girls got top marks. They're saying "That's not fair. She's got this." And the girls would say "Yes I've got that and I deserve that because I worked. Have you got a problem with that?" The girls are not worried about peer pressure so much. They know they've got to work. The boys rely on doing well at football or music. It's almost like "I don't want to do this if it requires too much work". (Thelma, Thomas Baker)

I do see a lot of differences between the boys in this school, and girls in my last school, but this may be because I came from an African school where there was a much higher standard. There's a very casual approach to work here. They know they could do better but they don't make the effort. (Fran, St. Francis).

They are very presumptuous about how good they are. They think they are doing well. For example, they don't think they need to write down homework. They do what they have to do. They are not terribly responsible for their work – they take the mickey out of someone who is too conscientious. (Toni, Thomas Baker)

There were several observations about boys' over-reliance on the teacher, on being told what to do. However, there is also a suggestion in the quotes above that boys have a different expectation of their success than girls. They expect to achieve without working too hard. They are described as 'presumptuous', they 'can't be bothered', they rely on football and music. Perhaps this perception fits with the comment from Tessa below, that in her experience girls are 'better at taking instruction' because they are not as confident of their success. Tessa also remarked that boys need 'learning to be in context', they need 'faster results':

Teaching languages in a girls' school or even in a mixed school, you get a much better response. You have to rethink your methodology. Boys need to have their learning much more in context. They need to see where they are going. They need faster results and a lot more interaction with the language. They have to feel that they are learning with you, they can trust you and you want them to do well. I think boys tend to give up and are much more defensive. Girls are happier to take instruction and do as they are told. Girls will plod along more and keep going. (Tessa, Thomas Baker)

However, Freda and Elizabeth described different degrees of motivation in St. Francis (a Catholic comprehensive) and Edgerton (a City Technology College):

The boys are much more motivated compared to my previous school where they thought there wasn't any point. In that area there was a lot more crime, drug abuse. They didn't see any jobs that were worth going for. Here they believe they have a future and have higher expectations of themselves. They are more focused on their learning. The fifth year have just finished their mocks. They were coming at 8.00 in the morning to work in the library, and taking it seriously. They don't mess about. They want to achieve. (Freda, St. Francis)

They're more resistant to learning. Don't forget I was working in a primary school. The girls would get much more involved in their learning. The boys had to be persuaded,

cajoled. I think it's the culture among boys. But having said that, there are boys here who are very involved in their work. It's not general. (Elizabeth, Edgerton)

Women teachers' discourse about learning is strikingly similar in the 2000s and 1980s, Elizabeth's mention of difference between boys in terms of learning approach is unusual (but see Eileen below). Similarly, girls' approach to learning is also undifferentiated. Difference between girls and boys is talked about as if it is 'normal'.

'Boys are competitive and have few group work skills' and 'Boys prefer "doing" to talking'

Discourses about boys' competitiveness and difficulty with group work were found in three of the schools:

I can't teach in the way I would like. Pair work in some classes is very difficult. It's their experiences, age, and maturity. Their relationship between one another is very competitive. They are waiting to put one another down, "that's stupid. You're stupid." I'd like to do more collaborative work, rather than teaching from the front all the time and having to be in control of what's going on. (Tamsin, Thomas Baker)

They're very competitive. They're obsessed with levels, numbers and percentages because they're given them all the time. It's quite hard when you've written something and you want them to look at the written target and they just focus on the number. It's difficult to get them to focus on the skills you want them to develop. It can be hard to get them to concentrate. Having said that there are boys that like reading and writing, are good at it and enjoy it. (Eileen, Edgerton)

When I first got here I tried collaborative work a lot, now I do it less and less. Mainly because I don't find it effective. Sometimes it works very well, but quite often what happens is either they fight with each other, or they just sit and chat. They don't see it as serious work. The serious work is when they are working by themselves. If they are working in groups it's "This is just mucking around. (Fay, St. Francis)

Once again, the teachers in Cliff Edge had a different perception:

I think they're quite happy to have their preconceptions challenged – they're quite open to that. They like talk and they like group work. In a mixed school I found boys talked much less than girls. Here they like talk and they like a lot of it. (Caroline, Cliff Edge)

As well as challenging the discourse that 'boys don't do group work' the above quote also highlights the perception that boys like discussion.

The specific characteristics of boys highlighted by their women teachers, for example, 'competitive', 'active', 'boisterous', constitute a cohesive discursive formation of 'maleness' that contrasts with the opposite, unspoken, discursive formation of 'femaleness'. Active denotes motion, a state of progress, busyness, quickness, capable of exerting influence. 'Passive' on the other hand, suggests receiving, submitting without resistance, inertia, being 'acted on'. Competitive suggests rivalry, contest for some prize or advantage, struggle for some scarce resource, spiritedness. It's antonym, 'collaborative' suggests joint working toward a common

goal, combination of persons, shared, mutual benefit, but of course has a second, very different meaning that gives pause for thought: treacherous co-operation. This strikes me because it highlights some of the problems that occur in groups, including between women: problems that were perhaps overlooked by women valorising 'female' qualities in the 1980s.

c. 'Schools are sexist'

'The school ethos is masculine'

Two teachers in Thomas Baker and two in Edgerton described the school ethos as 'macho':

It's a very macho environment. It's a predominantly male staff. Problems that the women have with the boys aren't even taken into consideration. (Tamsin, Thomas Baker)

It's very macho. Some of the senior management team are women, but they're just as macho as the guys. (Ellen, Edgerton)

Other teachers in Edgerton were critical of the school ethos. However, they did not describe it as 'masculine'. Although Eileen and Emily, below, talked about the old boys' network in the school, the lack of democracy, the amount of competitiveness and lack of support from colleagues, they are equally critical of senior female members of staff:

It's a very repressive regime and I don't think that helps the kids. It's rigidly streamed and streaming is used as carrot and stick. That's not good. The female director of studies is a bully. There's a real culture of everyone making out how good they are at the expense of everyone else. It's competitive and no teamwork, no sense of supporting your colleagues. I like the boys and I think they deserve better. (Eileen, Edgerton)

There's no dialogue, no consultation, no forums for raising issues. No attempt at being democratic. There's an old boy's network in the school – a number of men play rugby together and managed to get appointed to senior management posts together. There are quite a few more men than women teachers, although quite a lot of women on the senior management team. Two of the deputy heads are women, but neither of them is sympathetic. You sink or swim. (Emily, Edgerton)

Other teachers in Thomas Baker, St. Francis and Cliff Edge were very happy in the school. They felt supported by the senior management, trusted and liked:

It's a lovely place to work. Everyone knows exactly what they should be doing. Nobody checks up on you. Everyone assumes you're doing your work. It's the best place I've ever worked. (Freda, St. Francis)

I would say that the line managers are very supportive. Any comment that any pupil might make they would have that pupil outside their door. (Thelma, Thomas Baker)

It's very supportive. I think the senior management team place a great emphasis on the teacher as an individual. In my first teaching job I always felt this clear divide between my home life and work. And that said to me that there's no support for me at work for anything affecting me. Here without getting emotionally tied up into individual's private lives there is a message that this is a job and you have a life outside. I think that's quite unique. (Cass, Cliff Edge)

It's not macho at all. Firstly I think we have about 58% women staff. One of the 2 deputy heads is a woman and of the three assistant deputy head's 2 are women. Quite a few heads of department are women and the middle management is 50/50. There is a small group of 'lads' in the staffroom. It's expressed particularly around sport. Having said that some of the women in the school like football and will join in. It isn't *sexist* in its expression. Sexism wouldn't be tolerated in the staff room by male or female staff. (Connie, Cliff Edge)

Freda, Fay and Thelma talked about being very happy in the schools, but also remarked on feeling occasionally that there was a bit of a 'boys' club' atmosphere. In St. Francis Freda said there are no women in the leadership team and Fay talked about feeling a little 'sidelined':

I don't know whether it's the expectations, but little things like when the school magazine comes out there are no female teachers in it. It's hard to put your finger on it but sometimes you think there's a bit of sidelining going on. On the whole though they are supportive. (Fay, St. Francis)

Teachers at Cliff Edge all talked about their sense that in their school, boys could experience a range of ways of being a boy – this is one of the things they appreciated about the school:

I expected to leave in the January and teach in a mixed school, but within a month I thought it was an amazing experience. I expected boys' schools to be places where boys couldn't be emotional. My experience is that it is a place where they can be emotional, and a range of things. There are the academic kids in the school, white working class underachievers – they are the ones that do less well than any other group. There are the rough, tough would-be ghetto working class kids who are genuinely really nice lads. There's the grungers who like dope and key into alternative cultures. There's two constituencies who smoke lots of dope – the black working class and the white middle class. I really like working here. (Caroline, Cliff Edge)

A very normal school and a very good school. It's lovely working here. I think we are a school that accepts if something is not working we try and do it differently. The school reflects my community. I'm pretty much at home. I live close by. I was born in London, moved to the West Indies for 8 years, and came back here. I don't feel I come to something different. There are lots of varied experiences that the kids bring, but in here there's a community spirit. The boys know this is their school. (Cynthia, Cliff Edge)

Women in St. Francis, and particularly Cliff Edge, express a sense of feeling comfortable in the schools. They appear to feel 'at home'. This contrasts strongly with the 1980s discourse in which women appeared to perceive the boys' schools as 'alien' environments; perhaps an environment in which they did not feel safe.

'There is less emphasis on relationships and more on control'

In line with the comments above about the atmosphere in the school, teachers in St. Francis and Cliff Edge thought that there was a lot of emphasis on caring relationships in the schools:

The head is a very charismatic person. Boys know they can go to him and get a sympathetic ear. This is his school. He genuinely cares about the boys and is saying to them 'I am in this for you all the way'. I think they feel that. (Connie, Cliff Edge)

The boys have incredibly good relationships with a lot of the male staff who are very good here. It's not an aggressive school. It's a very caring ethos. Some of the staff you look at, great big rugby staff, and you watch them with the boys, and they are very quiet and very calm with them. Yelling and shouting is rare. (Faith, St. Francis)

Women teachers perceived less emphasis on relationships and care in Edgerton:

There is a real deficit view of the kids here and the idea that they need to be kept down and this is what is appropriate for kids like this. I don't know if that's anything to do with the male female thing at all, or whether it's a race thing or what it is. I just don't subscribe to that view. I don't like streaming. (Emily, Edgerton)

I think some male teachers can be more bullying in the way that they deal with the kids, whereas female staff can't be bullying in the same way, not in that physical way of yelling, body language (Ellen, Edgerton)

Several women commented that being male gave advantages because of size and voice projection. This discourse is reminiscent of the 1980s discourse that emphasised a more authoritarian approach to discipline in boys' schools, often seen in terms of 'control' rather than negotiation, Women seem to value the latter more:

I do think that not having a big physical presence is sometimes a disadvantage. When I look at the way male teachers achieve control - loud voices - I probably would have to use other methods to get what I want. (Fay, St. Francis)

It's hard if you can't shout, if you have a different way of getting them to work. I've found the model here quite hard. Some women emulate that and reproduce that. But it isn't how I want to work. Of course the kids are not used to working in groups, to being consulted, or to discussing. (Eileen, Edgerton)

The male teachers have a much more authoritarian approach. My approach is more negotiated. I think however much presence you have, you don't have the same presence as men, because of physical size and strength and ability to make your voice boom, and intimidate. I'm glad to say I don't have many male colleagues who use that kind of tactic, but it does happen and inevitably can cause problems for female staff. (Tessa, Thomas Baker)

It seems that the ethos of boys' schools, as experienced by women teachers, varies quite considerably and relates to senior management style, the role and number of women in the school, the general 'atmosphere' of care promoted in the school, the relationships developed between staff, and between staff and boys. However, this difference between schools is not the focus of the study. For the purposes of the thesis, it is noted that women generally value the 'soft' rather than the 'hard' approach to discipline and that this preference has not changed since the 1980s. They value, as they did then, getting boys to do work and behave by building relationships rather than by imposing discipline. However women talk about these issues in relation to personal preference, rather than constructing these behaviours as 'masculine' or 'feminine'.

A number of women talked about their perception of difference in teaching approach in a boys' school compared to a coeducational or girls' school, and the difficulties of group work/collaborative work because of the norms in the school:

It's quite traditional the way boys are taught here. It's quite strict. When they come across a more relaxed style they can't cope. (Faith, St. Francis)

Collaborative work is often almost a waste. Group work's not the ethos of the school and conditions are difficult in classrooms – they're very crowded and the tables are set up in rows and in a 40-minute lesson it's difficult to sort that out. In the end you take the easy option. (Fay, St. Francis)

I have a different way of working and it's not supported. My discipline doesn't look good from the outside. They are out of their seats and they talk. It's a bit noisy. But real work gets done. Real thought happens. They are on a journey with me. They have to engage with issues and learning in my classroom, and some of the written work is good. Other people want to teach in a different style. I can see in a way that gets results although I think they spoon-feed them a lot. (Eileen, Edgerton)

In the 1980s issues relating to teaching style and discipline were themselves identified as part of the 'gender regime' that helped to construct 'masculinity'. 'Masculine' values were identified as underpinning these approaches, and were contrasted with 'feminine' values. In the 2000s some women teachers identify the same differences in teaching style and discipline between boys' schools and mixed or girls' schools, as those identified in the 1980s. These approaches are disliked, but they are not related to sexism, in other words they are not linked to oppression, inequality or discrimination. They are not politicised: not linked to access to decision-making or empowerment, either for women themselves or the boys.

'Male staff are sexist'

In contrast to many women teachers in the early 1980s, only Tamsin described male staff as sexist, but not in an 'overt way'. None of the teachers described any 'sexist' incidents concerning male colleagues:

A lot of male teachers are *sexist*, not overtly. It's just a different kind of atmosphere and totally different experience. I wouldn't believe how different. If you've taught in inner city schools as long as I have, you think you know what you're doing. (Tamsin, Thomas Baker)

Other women experienced a form of paternalism, but found male colleagues supportive:

The male staff can be quite patronising in the nicest possible way, but its like going back to the early 80's in Fenham....There is an attitude that women staff need protecting. (Freda, St. Francis)

There is a sense that the male management of the school operate a kind of paternalism with the boys and with the staff. But they're very supportive. It links back to the kind of school it used to be. Some of the staff have been here a very long time. (Cynthia, Cliff Edge)

None of the women talked about feeling discriminated against at work. It may be that

discrimination does not occur because of changes resulting from feminism. On the other hand, it could relate to findings by the EOC (Roberts, 2003), that women's perception of discrimination has changed (in the EOC survey women and men found this behaviour 'natural'. It was a personal not a political issue). Or perhaps, as suggested earlier in relation to sexual harassment, discrimination is not experienced because experiences follow beliefs, and beliefs (discourses) have changed.

6.3 Women teachers' strategies for work with boys

In the 1980s solutions to the 'problems' were constructed in the following ways:

- equal opportunity and anti-sexist work in boys' schools
- developing a new 'anti-sexist' curriculum and resources
- INSET about sexism in boys' schools, including developing anti-sexist policies
- women's groups in both co-ed and boys' schools
- commitment to co-educational schools

Unsurprisingly none of the above constructions of solutions were found in 2003. In relation to the last of these strategies, some women teachers in 2003 thought that there might be advantages for boys in single sex schools:

I don't necessarily think that boys' schools are good for all boys. I think the parents with their child have to look at what's best for that individual child. I don't think it's wrong and I don't think they should be got rid of but I do think parents should think carefully about it. A lot of the boys do well here. (Toni, Thomas Baker)

They are more able to express themselves without girls there. I thought in mixed classes the boys' behaviour was much more self-consciously linked with ideas about being male, than in a boys' school. (Caroline, Cliff Edge)

Suggestions for useful ways of working with boys included a greater variety of learning tasks, and 'appealing to all the senses'. This seems to give some credence to the discourse about boys having a particular kind of learning style. Perhaps surprisingly, given the discourse about boys and kinaesthetic learning found in the previous chapter, only five teachers talked about boys' preference for action: two teachers specifically mentioned kinaesthetic learning.

Boys are more fidgety, so if you can give them things where they are moving around a lot, and can touch and play. It appears to me they are much *more kinaesthetic learners* than girls are. (Ellen, Edgerton)

They want to be involved more. They're *more kinaesthetic*. It may be partly genetic, or a cultural thing where boys are seen to be more active, and so they feel they should be. We seem to get a lot more boys here suffering from Attention Deficiency syndromes, hyperactivity and all kinds of things. Much more so than I was aware of with girls. (Tessa, Thomas Baker)

They probably do need to be *more active* in their approach. They cope better when they are doing. (Cass, Cliff Edge)

They are quite visual. They like action. I find it works to get them to stick their thumbs up or down, or to involve some kind of action. To begin with they didn't like it but now they can see that it really helps them. I've noticed that here. It wasn't so noticeable in the mixed school. (Tamsin, Thomas Baker)

Making sure that the teaching is absolutely right for them. Giving them a greater variety of learning tasks within a lesson. Appealing to all of the senses is more important than in a girls' school. (Toni, Thomas Baker)

Several teachers talked about boys needing very structured writing tasks, for example mind-mapping. Providing more structure generally, humour, setting short term targets, giving immediate rewards and more praise were also perceived as important:

It helps if they have quite structured tasks to do where they can see early achievement. I think they also like the incentive of an important piece of work – that helps in terms of motivation. (Fay, St. Francis)

My strategies in the classroom are different with boys. I use humour, providing it's not putting them down. They are less independent as learners than girls. They need structure. They need short-term gratification, lots of praise, much more so than girls. I think most people agree that short-term targets are really important for boys. (Connie, Cliff Edge)

They like to have something immediate. A reward or the results of their work and if they have a mark – the reason for it. So explaining, reward systems. (Elizabeth, Edgerton)

Another strategy was to adopt a curriculum that the boys' would find more interesting:

In my last school we adapted the curriculum to make sure the boys would find it more interesting. We looked at Vietnam and that worked brilliantly. We looked at Law, Order and Policing and focused on Jack the Ripper. We got more boys interested in why that was happening. We worked a lot on literacy – giving them tools to jump through the hoops in order to get grades. We tried to introduce the idea that history is a bit like Maths. So if you were looking at Nazi Germany the equation would be Hitler, plus the problems of Germany equals Hitler into power. They would know if they were writing they must balance their equation out. We gave them all the language they would need at the beginning. We broke everything down. (Thelma, Thomas Baker)

In the 1980s feminist teachers were critical of the temptation to make subjects 'objective' or 'rational' in order to make them 'boy-friendly': 'This may attract boys initially, but it does nothing to break down barriers between what is "male" and what is "female", what is "affective" and what is "objective"' (Askew and Ross, 1988a: 108). The strategies above are in line with the dominant solutions outlined as part of the 'Reaffirming boys' approach described in chapter five. Thelma's response above also clearly highlights the discourse of achievement, testing and standards prominent since the beginning of the 1990s, rather than discourses relating to personal development and individualized learning (part of the progressive ideology of the 1960s and 1970s). Eileen, who has taught for twenty-nine years talked about being sceptical about suggested strategies to get boys through examinations, and felt that the most important thing was being interested in, and liking the boys, as did three other teachers:

I've read the top 20 tips for working with boys like making the objectives clear. I don't think that making the objectives clear is that fascinating for boys at the beginning of a lesson. I think the most important thing is having a good relationship with them - really being interested in them. I don't go for this stuff about only doing things boys are interested in. I think they are very interested to learn about women's world and how girls think - I've read books with them about single mothers. I think it's about relationships. (Eileen, Edgerton)

You *do* have to like the children. You have to have very clear boundaries with boys, but if they know you want them to do well and are supportive they respond very well. You build a different sort of relationship with them. (Tessa, Thomas Baker)

The emphasis on building relationships echoes the conclusion we reached from teaching SfL in WBS. Relationship building supposes the notion of reciprocity, emotional connectedness between people, regard and respect. It seems to highlight similarity and common humanity, rather than differences. However, while Cynthia suggested that it is not a matter of developing specific strategies, but of raising our awareness and understanding of boys, she nevertheless stresses difference:

They should have a good common education but I think the debate about boys and girls should have a higher profile. I think that boys and girls don't develop in the same way. There are differences physically, psychologically and, rightly or wrongly, in their roles. I think educators should be aware of those differences. Not so much of how we treat our children, but how affected we are by their behaviours. I think boys and girls want to get to the same place but I think they need different things on that road. (Cynthia, Cliff Edge)

Three women thought it was important not to be aggressive with boys. Six mentioned the need to set an example and have high expectations. For example:

It's wrong to assume that they need to be treated in an aggressive manner. I think staff almost feel they need to be aggressive. Staff who have difficulty feel they need to be hard. If women shout boys find it difficult to know how to respond. They can take shouting from a man, but a woman shouldn't shout. We should insist on high quality, well presented work. Work with boys and girls should be the same. I feel I need to be clear in my expectations and have very high expectations. You need to be consistent and fair. (Toni, Thomas Baker)

This school is not particularly authoritarian. I don't think it needs to be. I think discipline is effective if you are a disciplined person yourself and you come with fair principles. I think there could be less concentration on their behaviour and more on their learning, even when the behaviour is not acceptable. I think young people respond very well to praise. There is a better response from a boy when I say something like, "I think you are a very able nice young man and I've seen what you can do, and right now you are not doing that" as opposed to "You are making too much noise. Get out." If you challenge, and don't get too wound up, and home in on the learning you get a better response. (Cynthia, Cliff Edge)

These solutions are quite different from those developed in the 1980s. They are more focused on leading by example, being the 'grown up' who sets standards and expects the children to meet them. Discourses of 'participation' and 'negotiation' are perhaps less frequent than they

were in the 1980s. Only one woman talked about the need for the curriculum to explore masculinity and femininity:

I think the curriculum needs to challenge boys' perceptions of themselves and women, and the space to do that in the curriculum is declining. It becomes something for individual teachers or departments to do, rather than driven by the top down, either nationally or locally. In my department for example we do a unit in year 7 on masculinity in the media – how men and women are represented in the media. I think there needs to be more of that through the whole school. (Caroline, Cliff Edge)

Analysis of women teachers' dialogue from the 1980s showed that they explained the 'problem' of sexism by drawing on sex role theory and patriarchal theory stressing the social construction of sexism. Women interviewed in the 2000s didn't identify sexism in boys or in the organisation, and generally nor did they identify 'underachievement' as a problem. Some women specifically challenged this:

I think boys' achievement's too political. It's either the headlines 'girls are outdoing the boys' I think 'Yes. So?' or 'boys are catching up'. I'm thinking what are you expecting from boys. What does underachievement mean because that's a very general statement isn't it? Who's actually underachieving? When you compare like with like it's working class people, who as a class may not aspire, and why should they, to what other classes of people aspire to. So when we talk about underachievement, what exactly are they underachieving in? They are underachieving in the government markers. The 5 plus A-C's. (Ellen, Edgerton)

I'm very wary of comments about underachievement. I think it's encouraging people to think very narrowly about what school and education are about. The government have to be measured. They have to be able to say 'this is what we have done'. People have expectations and the government wants to be able to say 'well it might look bad, but statistics show that this has improved and this is what's going on'. They have to find a way in with the electorate. It's about measure, measure, measure, paperwork, paperwork, paperwork. (Cynthia, Cliff Edge)

Fran and two other women thought that adults (teachers and parents) have different expectations of boys, as do young people themselves:

Boys will deliver what you expect of them. If you expect them to be good they'll be good. If you expect them to be bad, they'll be bad. Your beliefs about them make a big difference. Otherwise why can the same boy deliver first class work for one teacher and be consistently in detention for another. Boys are different in different contexts. Another example: boys will go to a classroom before the teacher goes in and draw some horrible stuff on the board. The same boys will go into another classroom and find some horrible stuff on the board and wipe it off. (Fran, St. Francis)

I think we allow them to be immature. I think women allow boys to stay lads. We don't expect so much of them. We are very much about getting them outside, and racing around and letting off steam. (Freda, St. Francis)

I would say most of the girls I taught come from very different backgrounds. A lot of them were African, or Afro-Caribbean and they were expected to go to University. You know "My daughter will achieve." Lots of parents are very keen that their daughter is not going to mess around and get a name for herself. There's an awful lot of pressure on these girls. The girls are identifying the professions and they have a huge support network. They are very strong, organised, driven and ambitious. (Thelma, Thomas Baker)

Fran's comment is interesting because she talks about boys being different in different contexts: her understanding reflects the social constructivist assertion (see next chapter) that both between and within each boy are multiple masculinities. Fran and Freda are employing quite different discourses to those encountered in the 1980s during work to support women teachers in boys' schools. They are themselves accepting some responsibility for the boys' behaviour. This is reminiscent of Adams St Pierre's (2002) contention that a poststructuralist analysis demands that we do not 'place the blame elsewhere, outside our own daily activities, but that we examine our own complicity in the maintenance of social injustice' (*Ibid*: 484).

Women teachers' discourses in the 1980s and 2000s

Some discourses that women teachers use about boys are different from those used in the 1980s. Perhaps these discourses are more similar to those used before the 'equal opportunity' era in the 1980s. It will be interesting to go back to boys' schools in another 20 years to look at discourses then. However, it seems that many perceptions of behaviour and approach to learning, although seen with a less critical eye, are the same as those described in the 1980s. For example, boys are physical, competitive, less collaborative, poor at group work. These discourses, as in the 1980s tend to give credence to essentialism. Writers exploring the historical construction of ideas about masculinity question essentialism and show that contemporary notions about manhood emerged from the end of the 1700's: they are historically and socially specific (Rotundo, 1993; Mosse, 1996). Masculinity came to be defined in terms of vigour, bodily strength, assertiveness and these qualities were encouraged in athletics clubs, scouting and other societies. Qualities such as aggression were valorised. Mosse (1996) points out that the construction of modern masculinity, with its emphasis on the physical body was linked with the rise of the new bourgeois society at the end of the 18th century: old aristocrat ideas about chivalry were adjusted and incorporated by the new middle classes:

Chivalry and manly honour, in the modern age, meant not only moral but also general physical toughness. Physical skill and dexterity had always been prized as necessary to defend one's honor, but now the new society in the making looked at the entire male body as an example of virility, strength and courage expressed through the proper posture and appearance...what had been present earlier in a fragmented manner was now systematized, formed into a totality in which not merely dress and bearing but the male body itself became the focus of attention, judged...according to a set standard of beauty. A stereotype was fashioned that would determine the perceptions of manhood in the modern age, when earlier times knew no such method of classification (Mosse, 1996: 23).

Women today, as in the 1980s, seem not to problematise the concept of 'maleness' itself.

A striking difference between discourses in the 1980s and today relates to perceptions about relationships between boys and women teachers, and between male and female teachers. An unexpected discourse used by a number of teachers in the 2000s was that if women teachers are harassed they themselves are to blame. Women did not perceive boys as abusive, or boys' schools as patriarchal 'sexist' institutions, although there are some aspects of schools that are disliked, for example, streaming and 'transmission' teaching methods. However, this is not the case in every school. Where it is the case, aspects of school organisation are not described as 'masculine'.

This seems to give weight to the thesis that how something is perceived and whether or not it is perceived as a 'social problem' does not depend on the event/happening/extent of a phenomenon, and perhaps not on individual commitment to personally held values, but on prevailing discourses, themselves an outcome of the social context. It does seem that discourses used by the women in these interviews are remarkably consistent. They use similar language and have similar understanding of boys. Most emphatically, women teachers in boys' schools in the 2000s problematise *neither* boys' behaviour (as did women teachers in the 1980s) *nor* boys' achievement (as do the media and public policy). Some women question the focus on achievement and the idea that 'achievement' as measured by public tests is the purpose of education, although some of the strategies suggested by others, including more active learning, structured writing, and content more relevant to 'boys' interests', are similar to those discussed in the last chapter under 'Reaffirming the Boys'.

What is similar, in discourses used in both the 1980s and in the 2000s is identity 'politics of difference'. Boys are viewed as sharing similar characteristics that are different from a set of characteristics shared by girls. The theoretical discourse of 'multiple masculinities' examined in the next chapter, seems not to have impacted on the ways that women teachers talk about and understand boys in the 2000s. Indeed, the biological discourse of 'natural' masculinity appears to underpin some of these ways of understanding and talking about boys.

Most interesting, nevertheless, is the impression that women teachers' discourse implies an element of cohesion or solidarity with boys and men present in *all* discourse in the 2000s: it will be evident in chapter seven that the two dominant contemporary academic discourses explain boys difference from girls in a manner which is entirely sympathetic toward boys, as are the *effects* of the boys' underachievement discourse (discussed in chapter five). Despite their different orientations, these discourses appear to unite opinion around the need to make boys the focus, in a way that feminism and discourses about girls achievement did not. I do not raise this as part of an argument that this is mistaken or wrong, or that girls should have more attention, but in an attempt to clarify that contemporary discourses about boys and masculinity have the *same result*: to produce consensus. Discourses that serve the purpose of producing accord must be considered beneficial, particularly in societies undergoing the kinds of transition and change highlighted in chapter eight.

Chapter Seven. Competing discourses within masculinist writing and the social function of each.

7.1 Introduction

One aim of this thesis is to study the struggles that occur between discourses relating to gender and education. This chapter contributes to this aim by identifying competing discourses within Masculinist writing since the mid -1990s. Masculinist study is itself a modernist project because of its attempt to find the 'truth' of identity (see chapter two). In line with the poststructuralist framework and aims of the thesis, I attempt to go beyond analysis and argument and to identify the *social function* of these different discourses. The four discourses identified here are:

- Sex role theory
- New essentialism
- Social constructivism
- Deconstructivism

The dominant contemporary popular discourse is new essentialism, while in academia the dominant discourse is social constructivism. In figure 7, page 142, I identify differences between these discourses in relation to their explanatory frameworks, view on essentialism/particularism and structure/agency.

This chapter begins with a sketch of early masculinist writing before turning to an examination of the three last of these discourses (sex role theory was an earlier discourse and discussed in chapter four), and particularly how identity and power are conceived in each.

In the 1970s/early 1980s masculinist writing was rare compared to the vast feminist literature⁴¹. In the late 1960s and early 1970s writers were beginning to ask what it meant to be male. Sexton (1969) in the *Feminised Male*, asked:

What does it mean to be masculine? It means, obviously, holding male values and following male behaviour norms ...Male norms stress values such as courage, inner direction, certain forms of aggression, autonomy, mastery, technological skills, group solidarity, adventure, and a considerable amount of toughness in mind and body (Sexton, 1969: 15).

⁴¹ This literature: 'spans educational sociology, psychology, history, curriculum theory and most major curriculum areas. Few fields of knowledge or educational practice are free from its critical gaze. It revises or rewrites sacred educational texts old and new, conservative and radical. It documents gendered inequalities in education and offers alternatives to dominant educational paradigms and practices' (Kenway, 1995: 65).

In Sexton's view women (schoolteachers and mothers) were turning boys away from 'true masculinity' through rewarding conformity and academic success, and creating sissies. Bednarik (1970) suggested that alienation at work, bureaucracy in politics and war, and the commercialisation of sexuality undermined masculinity. Writers such as Bednarik and Sexton accepted the traditional image of men as their original, proper nature, and argued that changes in the male role and in the way masculinity was expressed, were unnatural: *social harmony* arises from promoting 'true masculinity', not inhibiting it.

The first wave of the men's movement from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s was committed to personal and institutional change (Tolson, 1977; Levinson, 1978; Hodson, 1984; Seidler, 1985; Lloyd, 1985). First wave literature drew heavily on role theory (chapter four). These writers accepted that sexist oppression of women worked to men's advantage, while arguing that rigid sex roles also disadvantaged men. The idea that men as a whole are 'in crisis' has existed since this period. For example Hodson (1984: 1) entitled the introduction to his book *'Men in Crisis'*. Hodson attributed this crisis to the women's movement:

One of the primary reasons for the modern male crisis is the fact that women have been so successful in identifying the female crisis. The 'new women' no longer want the 'old' traditional men and constantly lambast them for their chauvinistic views, though usually underplaying the point that chauvinism traps men as well as women in roles they may not want (Hodson, 1984: 3).

Hodson identified changes in the workplace including an 'increasingly feminine economy' and emasculation through loss of work (Hodson, 1984: 4) as key factors which necessitated a reassessment of masculinity. He argued this would be as helpful to men as feminism had been to women. Hodson suggested women were more biologically successful since they lived longer, were constitutionally stronger, had more stamina, were more able to make relationships, and were less aggressive (*Ibid*: 13). His solution was for men to reconnect to their 'emotional selves' (*Ibid*: 140-141). The identification of difficulties in making relationships and expressing emotion, other than anger, was common in men's writing in the early 1980s (Hodson, 1984; Seidler, 1985). For example, Tolson (1977) found it was difficult for men to discuss any personal feelings with one another. This same conclusion was reached by Askew and Ross (1988a) following their experience of teaching boys in SfL, and 'anti-sexist' work at the time, as shown in chapter three. Anti-sexist work with boys incorporated a focus on facilitating boys in expressing their emotions. This goal was also shown to be central to one of the current strategies for boys described in chapter five, 'Reassuring boys'. First wave writers tended to focus on how pressure to be strong, aggressive, tough had led to men distancing from their feelings of fear or weakness. In turn this meant that men discounted their own emotional needs and found it difficult to respond to the emotional needs and wants of others (Seidler, 1985: 159). Toward the end of the 1980s, an increasing number of male writers claimed that men, too, were oppressed by the rigidity of their roles and, influenced by feminism, identified problems in

patriarchal structures and organisations that oppressed certain groups of men (Aggleton, 1987; Connell, 1987; Abraham, 1989a and 1989b).

Figure 7: Four Perspectives on Masculinity

Perspective	Central Assumptions	When popular	Male writers drawing on this explanation	View of similarity between men/men and women	Extent to which the theory focuses on social organisation or individual agency
Sex role theory	Culturally specific roles, behaviours, attitudes, appropriate for boys and girls are learned within social institutions including the family, media and school through modelling and imitation. Because these are learned rather than innate they can be un-learned and re-learned.	Late 1960s to mid-1980s	Hodson (1984) Lloyd (1985) Pleck (1976)	Men share many similar characteristics that are different from female characteristics.	Masculinity is produced through social organisation and relationships.
New Essentialism	Differences in behaviour, skills, abilities and interests between boys and girls, men and women are innate and determined by biology. Mechanism includes hormones, physiology and genetics.	1950s 1960s Re-emerging from 1990 onwards	Bly (1991) Biddulph, (1994, 1997) West (1993, 1995) Keen (1991)	Essentialist position. All men are the same and different from all women.	Masculinity is not an outcome of social organisation or social relationships.
Social constructivism	Masculinities are constructed through interplay of social and psychological factors as young men develop an identity through which to negotiate social processes. Masculinities are multiple – both between and within men, unstable and fragile.	Mid-1990s to 2000s	Brod and Kaufman (1994) Connell (1994) Mac an Ghail (1996)	Men are different from one another and different from women.	Masculinities are developed as an outcome of the interplay between psychological processes and social discourse/ social organisation.
Deconstructivism	Masculinity as a concept has no meaning. 'Masculinity/ies' and 'gender' are imagined constructs that set up a dualism between male/female, which perpetuates inequality.	Late 1990s Early 2000s	MacInnes (1998) Petersen (1998) Star (1999) Gilroy (2000)	Apart from reproductive differences, men and women are essentially the same.	Masculinity/ies do not exist, and therefore are the outcome of neither agency nor structure. The imagined belief in masculinity/ies serves a specific purpose in maintaining social arrangements.

7.2. New essentialist explanations: a return to biological determinism

In the early 1990s the second wave, the self-styled 'mythopoetic men's movement' arose (Adams and Savran, 2002: 5). This is based on notions of 'natural' masculinity and spearheaded by poet and activist Robert Bly (Bly, 1991). These authors seek a mythical past for models of contemporary 'manhood', for example the warrior figure. Men are seen as suffering a profound grief at the loss of 'masculinity' that needs to be restored to its 'rightful' and ritualistic place (Young, 1993: 324). In fervent versions of the new men's movement, boys and men are seen as the disadvantaged sex and depicted as the victims of sexism (West, 1993), for example, 'Men are now discriminated against in most aspects of life' (United Kingdom's Men Movement, 1995: v). This new men's movement, like liberal feminists and radical feminists before them, assumes that 'men' as a social group share a common identity. Writers like Bly and Keen (1991) believe they have been emasculated by feminism and an effeminising culture. 'By retreating into the wilderness and by exercises in spiritual interrogation, they attempted to recuperate their own innate masculine power' (Adams and Savran, 2002: 5). Tracey (1991) summarises the way in which male writers in the 'second wave men's movement' appear to view the problems of being male in the 1990s:

The so-called feminisation of postmodern society has produced a generation of soft males whose pathways to mature masculinity are blocked by the disintegration of collective rituals of manhood and by the absence of father-son (that is post Oedipal) solidarity. Men are suffering because masculinity has been pronounced sociologically unsound, because tradition has broken down and because no one knows what manhood is anymore (*Ibid*, 1991: 34).

These writers identify ambiguities in the male role, and believe these constitute a general crisis of 'masculinity'. In '*Iron John*' Bly (1991) identifies two kinds of men: the '50s' male and 'post 60s' male. The former lived in a pre-feminist era and understood what it meant to be a man. The second is embattled, undermined by feminism and advised to contact a more emotional, gentler side – this 'soft' male needs to get back to his 'wild' nature in order to attain a mature and balanced masculinity:

We have become used to seeing the Wild Man as wet, moist, foresty, ignorant, leafy, and all at once he is related to holy intellect and sun radiance – he is King (Bly, 1991: 232).

Biddulph (1994), influenced by Bly, believes that role model are scarce for modern men (see strategies, chapter five), and that we need to honour the unique qualities of boys. This new essentialist argument holds that there is a core personality and character that defines masculinity, which all men share, but which has been lost, constrained by culture, or overwhelmed by strong women, especially feminists:

In nature all development follows a laid-down sequence. In a man's development, the sequence has been forgotten and the process largely left to chance. If we look at older cultures we see immense and focused efforts going into the raising of boys – rituals, teachings and processes which have only feeble equivalents in our culture...The Sioux hunter, the Zulu warrior, the Aboriginal elder and the Mediaeval craftsman lived glorious lives and cared for and protected their people and their world. Why should modern man be any less a man than his ancestors? (Biddulph, 1994: 12).

Biological explanations implicitly underpin the arguments of the 'second wave men's movement'. As indicated in chapter four, biological determinism presumes boys' behaviour is an outcome of hormones or genes. However, the same chapter related that in the 1980s biological explanations were challenged by sex role theory. Since the mid-1990s biological explanations for sex difference are back and increasingly popular. As Bleach (1998: 2) writes 'there appears to be a growing post-feminist belief that males and females are different, after all':

There has been quite an explosion in this work in recent years, so much so that any attempt to address issues in the education of boys can hardly afford to ignore it. For if boys' nature, predispositions and abilities are biologically given, as some of the more simplistic biological arguments would have it, then the possibilities for boys and their education are immediately constrained (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998: 36).

Within these reworked biological accounts, men and women are once more seen as different in terms of temperament, interests and abilities, and this difference is yet anew imagined as biologically determined. Arguments about genes and hormones once again abound. Genetic programming is still used to explain differences that are said to exist between men and women: for example, the xy chromosome (xx in females) 'may genetically programme boys to be less aware of other's feelings, demanding of their time and be "unintentionally offensive" ' (Hawkes, 1997: 5). In the 1990s researchers were still arguing that testosterone is central, both in explaining supposed differences in brain structure and in behaviour between men and women:

Boys are biologically driven via a drug-like hormone that is one of the most powerful manipulators of behaviour the world has ever known. It is the force that pushes boys to be aggressive and inspires them to win at all costs (Elium and Elium, 1992: 17).

Testosterone is still used to explain both supposed high levels of male aggression, men's bigger brain (one-tenth larger than women's), and difference in brain structure. For example, research at the University of California, Berkeley involved castrating male rats, after which their brain apparently shrank to the same size as female rats (Science News. June 26, 1999): findings that are still disputed (Turner, 1994; Greenstein, 1993⁴²).

42 These researchers point out that since being aggressive or experiencing aggression raises testosterone levels it is difficult to measure its effect, and that changes found in species such as rats are not found in primates or humans. It seems that humans and the other primates have to a great extent been liberated from the chemical

While the argument about the role of testosterone is still ongoing, it is the new brain research that is causing the biggest excitement. A search of the Internet on 23.1.2001 of 'brain difference between men and women' found 13,613 sites on this topic. A search on 01.10.2005 using the same search terms and search engine, found *14,800,000 sites*⁴³.

Arguments that male and female brains are different are commonplace, and research to prove this difference abounds:

The brain, the chief administrative and emotional organ of life, is differently constructed in men and in women; it processes information in a different way, which results in different perceptions, priorities and behaviour (Moir and Jessel, 1991: 5).

Psycho-neurological researchers continue to look for difference in male and female 'intelligence' to account for supposed findings that women purportedly do better in tasks that test language abilities, fine motor tasks, perceptual speed, decoding nonverbal communication, and speech articulation and for the supposed finding that men are superior in 'visual working memory', tasks that require moving objects, aiming, fluid reasoning, knowledge of mathematics, science and geography and general knowledge (Halpern, 2000). These alleged differences are accounted for in a number of ways. For example because:

- men have a bigger brain (www.news6.thdo.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/8ci/tech/newsid (March 23. 1999).
- men are just more intelligent and score on average five points ahead of women on IQ tests (BBC News, 2005)
- a 'wider motorway' between left and right hemispheres in women leads to more effective communication between the two sides of the brain (Newsweek, 1995).
- tasks are processed in both halves of the female brain, but predominantly in only one half of the male brain (Kohn, 1995: 13-16).
- information is processed more quickly in the male than female brain (Dobson and Iredale, 2005).
- men have better evolutionary genetic intelligence, which enables them to master higher-level mathematical and scientific concepts (Murray, 2005⁴⁴).

straitjacket imposed by the sex hormones on lower orders it is difficult to point out which is the cause and which the effect.

43 Many of these sites appear to be Fundamental Christian.

44 Author of 'The Bell Curve' (1994) which argued that Black people are genetically inferior.

Many researchers and writers are critical of this new research. Gilbert and Gilbert (1998: 38) argue that it is 'misleading to refer to the brain as being connected in a particular way, as if brains operate in a similar manner to hardwired electronic devices'. Steven Rose director of the Brain and Behaviour Research Group at the Open University claims that studies suggest there is no difference in decision-making between men and women: 'It is true that men and women use different parts of the brain for similar tasks, but the time taken to complete the tasks is identical' (Dobson and Iredale, 2005: 5). In any case, the suggestion that male brains process information more quickly and are therefore more intelligent is clearly based on a particular discourse of intelligence: computers are able to process information more quickly than the human brain, however it is not suggested that computers are more intelligent than humans.

Brain studies research is riddled with contradictions. Research in the University of Cincinnati, for example, showed Men have 13% more neurons in the part of the brain related to thinking. Women have more connections between the neurons. Research at McMonste University in Canada, however, showed the exact opposite (www.medserve.dk/health/1999). The inconsistency of brain study findings is often explained on the basis that small samples are used, and Kimura (1992) concludes that the evidence for differences in brain asymmetry between men and women is 'meagre and conflicting' (Kimura, 1992: 81-87).

While in the 1970s the supposed difference in male and female brains was interpreted as a specialisation in the male brain resulting in a *positive* account of higher spatial ability in males, the same research is sometimes now interpreted rather differently as a *lack* of development of the left hemisphere in male brains, whereas female brains are seen to develop more symmetrically and be better connected (a positive attribute). Brain research has been used in the past to argue for male superiority: now some feminists use it as part of an evolutionary argument suggesting that 'female' qualities make women better equipped to survive in the changing world:

The interpretation of such evidence is controversial...some feminists of difference have now claimed that such findings demonstrate the 'natural' superiority of the female brain, while at least one Japanese theorist has described the way in which brain lateralisation works distinctively among the Japanese – of both sexes (MacInnes, 1998: 67)⁴⁵

Those critical of biological determinism argue that it over-estimates sex differences between men and women, differences that do exist are not fixed (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998: 44), origins of any difference is unclear, there is more variation within each sex than between each sex (Segal, 1990: 63), and the distribution of intelligence is much the same for all genders and all races (Bea Campbell, cited in Dobson and Iredale, 2005: 5).

⁴⁵ See Fuchs Epstein (1988: 52-6.).

Fuchs Epstein (1988: 3) calls the search for biological difference between men and women 'the compelling appeal of simplistic biological explanations, especially those that support cultural stereotypes.' Rather than explaining social behaviour, these 'natural' differences in the brains of men and women seems to be based on stereotypical cultural beliefs. Perceptions of biological difference promote the assumption that men and women develop different *identities* based on their biological difference. From this perspective because masculinity and femininity are innate, there are no possibilities for change:

The natural science project is driven by preconceptions of necessity; education looks for possibility. Science assumes determination; education embraces potential. To this extent, biological essentialism is, by and large, anti-educational, and educators must challenge at every turn constraining deterministic views of science (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998: 44).

It is argued that even if biological differences exist in male and female brains, it is a political and social choice about whether or not to amplify it, let it take its course, or make social changes to ameliorate its effects (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998: 37-38). These writers point out that the leap from an argument that male and female brains are differently structured, to the conclusion that therefore men and women think, feel, act, perceive things differently or vary in intelligence, is one of the chief weaknesses in the new essentialist argument.

Brain difference research appears to be gaining ground as the dominant popular discourse and is sometimes used as the justification for specific boys' strategies (as indicated by the development of 14,786,387 new sites on the web devoted to brain difference between men and women in under five years – see page 145, and by reference to brain difference in materials produced to support raising boys' achievement – see chapter five, page 105). From the post-structuralist perspective of this thesis the question is why there has been such an upsurge of interest in explanations focusing on difference between men and women, and what are the social regularities that enabled this? One explanation for the popularity of the discourse is that some men are anxious that the traditional role and image of men is disappearing and draw on 'natural' differences to support their argument for its return. However, Connell (1995b: 255) questions the assumption that the traditional role and image have disappeared at all, and argues that 'the idea that we live at the moment when a traditional male sex role is softening is as drastically inadequate as the idea that a true, natural masculinity is now being rediscovered. Both ideas ignore most of the world'. MacInnes (1998: 67) says that the *purpose* of this search for a 'natural' basis to human behaviour is 'ultimately a search for reassurance and psychic security through the romance of authenticity in a disenchanted world.' The resurgence of interest in biological determinism occurred in tandem with a conservative reaction to equal opportunities and to all disadvantaged groups (see chapter eight) and Petersen (1998: 10) points out that these

explanations can be 'strategically employed to draw boundaries between Self and Other, to justify rights, and to deny rights'.

The next explanation of masculinity, 'social constructivism', while established amongst male academics, has not become a part of the dominant popular discourse about masculinity to anything like the same extent as has new essentialism.

7.3 Social constructivists

Social constructivism is the basis of the new 'masculinity studies' that emerged in the early 1990s (Segal, 1990; Brod and Kaufman, 1994; Horrocks, 1994; Connell, 1995; Mac an Ghaill, 1996⁴⁶). In the 2000s, this torrent of work on masculinity continues. Social constructivist explanations purport to question essentialist assumptions of biological and sex role theories: boys have something in common (in addition to reproductive organs) that is different from that which girls have in common. Masculinity studies are partly influenced by poststructuralist questioning of the homogeneity of collective identities, and instead focus on inner difference, contradiction and fragmentation. In poststructuralism, identity politics⁴⁷ is replaced by the idea that identity is relational and based on difference from others (Sewell, 1997: 22). These inquiries focus on how certain masculinities oppress other men, while acknowledging feminism for its challenge and critique of the social and cultural orders that have created masculinities that subjugate women. Unlike the first wave of the men's movement, Masculinity Studies embraces a psychoanalytical account of gender and is also critical of patriarchal structures.

Social constructivists contributed to the critique of sex role theory by showing that it was too rudimentary to deal with the complexity of the psychic and social factors implicated in the construction of masculinity (Henriques *et al*, 1984; Connell, 1987). From the early 1990s Masculinity Studies endeavoured to show the workings and uncertainty of sexual identity in addition to the intricate and conflicting social and cultural contexts in and through which masculine identity is shaped and expressed. Explanations of social inequality offered by the social sciences over the last twenty years have tended to concentrate on either structural or

⁴⁶ These writers may not call themselves 'social constructivists'. I do so because they have in common a rejection of determinist explanations for identity as the outcome of biology or social structure, they view identity as actively socially constructed rather than passively incorporated through stereotypes or roles, they include an analysis of power in gender relations, and they recognise that identities are multiple and conflicting.

⁴⁷ Identity politics emerged in the late 1950s/1960s, as a challenge to cultural homogeneity and enabled marginal groups to assert the importance of their different voices and experiences (Sewell, 1997: 21). Identity

individual explanations for inequality. For example, they described racism as the psychology of prejudice or they focused on institutional racism and racist arrangements in society. Henriques *et al* (1984) suggested that this individual-society dualism is a false dichotomy because individuals cannot exist outside of society and society is composed of groups of individuals. If everything is determined by the structure of society, there is little possibility for change. Henriques *et al* argued that the liberal notion of prejudice as individual responsibility and the radical idea that responsibility rests with the system are locked together, one on each side of the individual-society dichotomy 'in a mutually propelling antagonism' (*Ibid*: 62). They developed explanations of inequality through an analysis of Foucauldian ideas about discourse, psychoanalysis and understanding of socio-economic and political factors. They emphasise the interconnectedness of these factors: on their own none of them are the primary cause of inequality.

Building on these ideas, social constructivists (Connell, 1987; Wexler, 1992) attempt to bring together psychoanalytic theory, social theories about labour and power structures and feminist theories about sexual politics. They combine notions of structure and agency and are critical of the idea that masculinity is purely the outcome of socialisation: in addition individuals construct masculine identity to enable negotiation of social power. For example, Wexler (1992) argues that schools are engaged in the task of producing meaning, and particularly 'the core meaning of self-identity' (*Ibid*: 10). However, he suggests that in Western society the possession of a "self" that is publicly valued and affirmed is fundamental: students in school are *engaged* in the project of 'becoming somebody' (Wexler: 7): they are *active* in the struggle for selfhood' (*Ibid*: 110-11), which frequently is a struggle against a school system and curriculum seen as irrelevant.

Connell (1987) maintains that this complex interface between schools as socialising agents, and individual agency produces not one, 'masculinity', but multiple masculinities. Men are different from one another and cannot be viewed as a unified group, although there is a 'dominant' masculinity to which women and young, effeminate or homosexual men are subordinate. This 'hegemonic'⁴⁸ masculinity exercises power through its 'moral' authority, 'underpinned by the threat of violence in particular contexts, and arises from patriarchal sexual relations, resulting in

politics was based on the assumption that there was an intrinsic and essential content to any particular identity, which could be traced to an authentic common origin or experience (Grossberg, 1994).

48 The concept of hegemony is derived from Gramsci who used it to explain how class power is maintained. He used hegemony to refer to the ways that the capitalist elite control the production of ideology. Through ideologies exploitative class relations are accepted as right and proper by the working class, who remain complicit in their own exploitation.

complex and changing patterns of male and female domination and subordination' (*Ibid*: 184-187). Different groups of men may have completely different interests in gender issues; thus different kinds of masculinity politics (politics that try to either preserve or modify masculinity) emerge. In this reading, masculinity is a social construction about what it means to be male in a particular time and place.

Social constructivists accept feminist arguments that, despite variations on the theme, men live their lives in and through power relationships over women. Men do not have to support hegemonic demonstrations of masculinity to gain from the power, which the phallus signifies over women. Just as there are many contesting masculinities, so too there are many femininities 'all of which are constructed in the context of the overall subordination of women to men' (Connell, 1987: 187).

This understanding of masculinity suggests that it is neither static nor monolithic, that there are many masculinities, both historically and temporally: depictions of masculinity do not inevitably connect with men's lives (Kenway, 1995). It also indicates that masculinity is a relationship of power between men. Much of the contemporary academic research focusing on boys' in school takes social constructivism as its explanatory framework.

In this view, masculinity is constructed in various social settings, including the school, family, workplace, leisure sites, the media and the state. The mass media exerts a potent authority about what it means to be male. Media messages are multiple, but some messages are stronger than others. The same can be said about the state. In its excessive form, the state assists in the making of masculinity through warfare. However, more generally it does so by institutionalising certain forms of power and knowledge (Connell, 1989: 254).

Before turning to an account of how school gender regimes are perceived to construct masculinity, it is useful to reflect on how social constructivism connects with contemporary boys' work in schools and with the overall focus in this thesis. In Figure 6, page 94, it was suggested that the major strategies, 'Reaffirming boys' and 'Reassuring boys' are underpinned by New Essentialism and Sex Role theory in turn. Strategies identified as 'Reforming boys' and 'Reconceptualising schooling' may be underpinned by social constructivism, but it was shown that these strategies are theoretical, rather than practical solutions adopted in schools in the UK. In relation to the overall thesis, it is important to question why social constructivism has become a dominant discourse in gender studies in academia. Social constructivism, like new essentialism, is not generally self-reflexive: it does not commonly ask why the problematisation of 'masculinity/ies' has occurred at this time, or why a good deal of the research remains *descriptive* of different ways of being a boy. Feminist theorising, in contrast (as shown in

chapter four) was largely focused on developing *explanations* of power inequality, rather than describing different ways of being female. The question of why discourse problematising masculinity/ies has become so prominent will be returned to later in this chapter.

7.3.1 Gender regimes in school

Research carried out in the early 1980s concluded that schools were ‘sexist institutions’ (Askew and Ross, 1988a; Askew, 1989) that shaped, enforced and constrained ‘masculinity’. As in the feminist writing of the 1980s, social constructivism is informed by both a critical pedagogical and a policy perspective (Lesko, 2000) that shows how schools are still ‘thoroughly gendered in their organisation and practice’ (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998: 114) and how they reinforce particular constructions of masculinity (Hayward, 1993; Lee, 1993):

It is within institutions, such as the school, that mechanisms of power are operationalised through specific administrative structures and pedagogical, social and disciplinary practices that are governed by particular norms (Martino and Pallotta Chiarolli, 2003: 7).

For example, Salisbury and Jackson (1996) detect all those practices, which were identified in the 1980s (Askew and Ross, 1988a; Askew, 1989 – see chapter three). These include:

- Male staff relying on strength and power over boys and women teachers, including sexual harassment and physical threats to pupils – ‘Some male staff in schools use their power in a variety of ways to protect their position within the pyramidal hierarchy, within the classroom and also to often unconsciously breathe life into the patriarchal values system without which their sense of order and stability would crumble’ (Salisbury and Jackson, 1996: 19).
- An ‘academic masculinist curriculum’, including a bias in favour of male interest in science and technology, but at the expense of the development of the emotional and artistic self (*Ibid*: 27).
- An emphasis on masculine values and qualities. For example on ‘real work’ with an end product and on competition (*Ibid*: 27). Associated with the academic masculinist curriculum is the way learning is organised and tested. When learning is being assessed, ‘it is how much each student can reproduce as an individual that is important, not what groups can do with the material together. These emphases on isolated individuals measuring themselves against others links closely with patriarchal values’ (*Ibid*: 31).

The way the organisation is managed, has also been identified as playing a significant part in its gendered nature. For example:

- Mac An Ghaill (1994) identifies 'New Entrepreneurial' teaching staff. These teachers promote managerialism and an entrepreneurial approach to schooling and the curriculum and develop a form of masculinity 'within the political nexus of managerialism, vocationalism and commercialisation, with its values of rationalism, possessive individualism and instrumentalism' (*Ibid*: 30).
- Davies (1992:128) claims that 'a competitive, point-scoring, over-confident, sporting, career and status conscious version of masculinity dominated school management'. In this kind of organisation, themes of hierarchy and individuation were prominent.

Social constructivism also stresses the association of masculinity with rationality, physical strength and objectivity:

- Hegemonic masculinity is associated with the hard, the dry and the strong (physical strength, instrumental skills, public knowledge, discipline, reason, objectivity, rationality and competition), femininity with the soft, the wet and the weak (physical weakness, expressive skills, private knowledge, creativity, emotion, subjectivity, irrationality and co-operation) (Connell, 1996). Sport, authority patterns, discipline, knowledge and teaching identities are persistently caught up in the hard and soft polarities, which distinguish between male and female and hegemonic and subordinate masculinities (*Ibid*, 1996). Dualities are arranged in hierarchies of esteem with the male pole claiming greatest merit (*Ibid*, 1996).

While analysis of how schools 'make' gender (Delamont, 1990) has changed little, unlike writing in the 1980s, social constructivism generally emphasises the ways in which gender regimes *differ* between schools and need not be *internally* coherent (however there is a dearth of cross-schools studies that highlight these differences). Gender regimes are subject to change, sometimes dramatically (Draper, 1993).

As stated above, social constructivism has also added an emphasis on agency that the 1980s analysis lacked: schools are sites for the *production* of sex/gender subjectivities, 'where people conform, deviate, challenge, participate and engage with state apparatuses' (Carlen *et al.* 1992: 30), but pupils *also bring* their ready-made definitions of masculinity and femininity, models of male-female interaction, old prejudices and concepts of change into school. Connell (1989: 164) argues that: 'Masculinity shapes education as well as education forming masculinity'. He notes: 'some masculinities are formed by battering against the school's authority structure, others by smooth insertion into its academic pathways, others again by a tortuous negotiation of possibilities' (*Ibid*: 66).

Several boy-centred research projects have focused on how boys negotiate school, and typologies of schoolboy masculinities are now common. In his research Willis (1977) identified 'lads' and 'ear'oles'. Kessler *et al* (1985) later recognised 'bloods' ('hearty sporting' types) and 'Cyrils' ('studious academic' types); Walker (1988) the 'footballers', 'Greeks', the 'three friends' and the 'handballers'; Connell (1989) the 'cool guys', 'swots' and 'wimps', and Mac An Ghaill the 'macho lads', 'academic achievers', 'new enterprisers' and the new middle-class 'real Englishmen' (Mac An Ghaill, 1994).

The 'macho lads' in Mac an Ghaill's study (1994) are in the bottom two sets for all subjects. They see school as hostile and meaningless. Their anti-school sub-culture includes 'looking after your mates', 'acting tough', 'having a laugh' 'looking smart' and 'having a good time'. The 'macho-lads' develop their identity in response to the school's authority structures. In contrast the 'academic achievers' consists of a small group of male friends who are positive about the academic curriculum, and seek a more traditional upwardly mobile route via academic subject credentialism. Many of them are from Asian and working class cultures. Mac an Ghaill writes that a central element of the 'academic achievers' masculine identity is their projected future of a professional career and their identification with 'mental production'. The 'new enterprisers' negotiate 'a new mode of school student masculinity with its values of rationality, instrumentalism, forward planning and careerism' (*Ibid*: 63). They are involved in mini-enterprise schemes and interested in the new technologies and computing studies. The 'real Englishmen', from the middle classes, envisage a future in higher education and a professional career, have values that emphasise personal autonomy and communication strategies, and refuse to affirm the legitimacy of teacher authority. Their masculine identity emphasises honesty, individuality and cultural superiority.

Recent boy-centred social constructivist research has explored 'how the identities of particular boys have been produced collectively as ways of dealing with and negotiating their particular environment' (Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002: 53). As suggested above, in this writing about masculinities and school, schools are both active sites for the construction of masculinities, and arenas where masculinities may be 'performed'.

7.3.2 Boy-centred research

Many 'masculinist' studies in the late 1990s/early 2000s aim to explore how boys see and experience themselves (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Sewell, 1997; Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998; O'Donnell and Sharpe, 2000; Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002; Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003). Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman (2002) state that the best of boy-centred research is interpretive and critical. Like masculinity studies generally, these writers are critical of sex

role theory, which 'treated schools essentially as conduits for society-wide norms, and children as passive recipients of socialisation' (Connell, 1996: 212):

Viewing boys as passive 'victims of gender socialisation' where boys just slot into a sexist role or script doesn't do justice to the complicated dynamics of boys' struggles, and resistances in the processes of becoming masculine (Salisbury and Jackson, 1996: 7).

Much contemporary boy-centred research is committed to the social constructivist attempt to bring together psychoanalytic theory and social theories, as described above. In this view, gender is not merely received by the boys, but is actively worked on and constructed through interaction (Lorber and Farrell, 1991). Not only are there different masculinities in different groups of boys, but also there are multiple masculinities *within* each single boy:

Masculine identity is always fragmentary and multi-faceted. Every single man or boy is made up of multiple masculine identities struggling for dominance. Within each man and boy there is a conflict going on between the fiction of a fixed, 'real me', masculine self and more fluid, alternative selves (Salisbury and Jackson, 1996: 7).

Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman (2002) also view boys as active subjects, while constrained by available discourse:

Thus, while this research addresses masculinities as everyday practices in which boys are engaged, emphasising agency and the meanings boys attach to their actions, it is also that their actions are constrained by the discursive positions available to them, and further that boys' investment in these positions are perhaps only partially conscious (Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002: 51).

According to Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman (2002) if boys' actions are constrained by the discourses available to them and if they are only partially conscious of their investment in particular masculine practices, then one implication is that:

...it is important for politics and for research to hold onto the notion of men as 'victims' as well as 'oppressors' in a patriarchal culture. Polarising gender into 'rational male subject/contentless female other', as has been the tendency in some otherwise critical work, obscures the multifariousness of masculinities and also the way in which their organisation is premised to some degree at least on the preservation of selfhood in the face of the fragmenting forces of contemporary 'postmodern' culture (Frosh, Phoenix, Pattman, 2002: 51).

Following postmodern feminist writers such as Butler (1990), in these accounts masculinity is a performance (Edley and Wetherell, 1998; Nayak and Kehily, 1996; Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003). Boys achieve masculinity by 'doing boy' (Bohan, 1997). Boys are 'people whose identities are continually reinvented in the language they use as they construct and re-construct gender and sexuality' (Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002: 50).

The disjointed and hierarchical articulations of masculinity are highlighted in work that focuses on the intersection of masculinity, sexuality, ethnicity and class. Martino and Pallotta Chiarolli (2003) are particularly interested in exploring the experience and understandings of 'masculinity' of boys on the borders (the *mestizaje*) including the experience of gay, and disabled boys. *Mestizaje* theory sees identities as hierarchical, fluid, transitory, fragmented and episodic (Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003: 9). Mac An Ghaill's work (1994) examines how gender intersects with sexuality in the formation of masculinity, Hayward and Mac an Ghaill (1997) with class and sexuality, while the work of Sewell (1997) shows how gender intersects with 'race'. Some boys problematise and occupy in-between spaces in their negotiation of the social practices of masculinity (Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003). For example, one 13-year-old boy interviewed by Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli defined himself as a 'tomgirl' and described how s/he switched between her identity as a boy and girl. However, the majority of boys are caught up in the normalising practices of self-regulation so as not to be seen as 'abnormal', although they may feel uncomfortable about being forced to regulate themselves (*Ibid*: 16). Boys in Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli's study (2003) talked about how boys' bodies were the main sites for defining and proving their 'normal masculinity' or calling the masculinity of others into question.

This reading of masculinity/ies, focussing on the intersection of different masculinities, challenges both the 1980s feminist discourse, as well as the contemporary discourse of boys' 'underachievement' – both of these discourses are based in dualist conception of boys as similar to one another, and different from girls. Social constructivism points to the tensions for boys in taking up polarised gender positions, including the costs to girls and certain groups of boys. This account draws on psychoanalytical theory which sees gender identity as involving a projection of seemingly unacceptable aspects of the self, including anxieties and desires, onto others – girls and subordinate boys (Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002). At the same time:

In developing their identity people draw on culturally available resources in their immediate social networks and in society as a whole. These 'resources' are, generally speaking, strongly gendered, with males and females receiving different messages, being constrained differently, and having access to different codes (Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002: 4-5).

This view of gender as performative and relational (influenced by postmodernism and poststructuralism) perceives masculinity existing in relation to femininity and as constructed through everyday discourses (Edley and Wetherell, 1997; Mac and Ghaill, 1994). Contemporary research with boys, identifies the 'relational' aspects of boys 'doing male' (boys must maintain their difference from girls and avoid doing anything seen as the kind of things girls do); the importance of being 'hard' 'cool' and good at sport; and the ways in which some boys are labelled as 'less boy' (Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002: 10).

In line with this idea of masculinity as a performance, Gilbert and Gilbert's (1998) study of boys in primary and secondary schools in Australia also found that:

While the experiences of gender of particular boys is complex, and changes with context, the performance of masculinity is always constructed in relation to a dominant image of gender difference (Gilbert and Gilbert, 1998: 143).

Other studies also focus on how masculinities are constructed around relations of power and 'the other' (Redman and Mac an Ghaill, 1997; Sewell, 1997). The 'other' may be non-macho boys, girls, or women teachers. Renold (2000: 321) found that 9-10 year old boys 'formed their heterosexual identities through symbolic sexual performances, public sexual innuendoes, sexual storytelling and sexual objectification of girls and women'. Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) show how boys constructed girls as bookish and clever, and themselves, in contrast, as active and sporty. Girls' cleverness was not admired but attributed to the fact that they have nothing else to do but work. Boys who did work in school were ostracised because they were seen as inactive (like girls) and antisocial.

The idea that boys develop their identity through constant enacting of their difference from girls is reminiscent of 1980s findings (Askew and Ross 1988a; Walkerdine, 1981). Epstein (1997: 109) found (as we noted in WBS) some boys are termed 'gay' or 'sissy' interchangeably and writes that homophobia is expressed toward 'non macho' boys in terms of their similarity to girls. Thus, homophobia and misogyny are linked. Duncan (1999: 106) found that in mixed schools the most prevalent accusation levelled at boys by both sexes was to be called gay (also reported by women involved in research for this thesis, see chapters three and six). The idea that some boys might actually be gay 'was inconceivable' (*Ibid*: 106). In this explanation, repetition of homophobic and misogynistic behaviours may be comprehended as an endeavor to construct an indefinable masculine ideal: there is no essential masculinity and, hence, boys actively attempt to buttress their masculine identities (Nayak and Kehily, 1996; Eder *et al*, 1995).

As was found at Woodland Boys' School (Askew and Ross, 1988a), boys 'act boy' in front of their peers, but other ways of acting boy are available. Walker and Kushner (1997), Wight (1994) and Pattman (1991) suggest that boys are 'softer', less competitive, or more prepared to talk about their anxieties when not in their peer group – thus contributing to the suggestion that different ways of 'doing boy' are available and that masculinity is multiple, fluid, and 'unstable' (Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002: 73). This emphasis on instability, fluctuation and diversity might lead to questioning whether the concept of 'masculinity/ies' is useful at all?

Critiques of social constructivism

Social constructivism differs from sex role theory in its emphasis on the interplay between the social and the psychological. However, Segal (1990) points out that social constructivist theorising tends either to emphasise the personal at the expense of the social or to emphasise the social at the expense of the intricate world of the psyche. She is not convinced by the attempt to integrate the two factors in the construction of masculinity. She writes that the challenge remains of moving toward:

...a complex integration of psychoanalytic accounts of family dynamics and unconscious motivations, on the one hand and sociological analysis of social structures, practices and relationships on the other (*Ibid*: 94).

The difficulty of reconciling structure and agency is that these concepts themselves are embedded in dualist, modernist assumptions about the nature of the world and the nature of knowledge⁴⁹ (Hearn, 1996), just as are the concepts of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. In addition, it appears inconsistent to state that the concept of 'masculinity' is a social construct (an ideology), and at the same time *describe* how masculine identity is constructed through social and psychological factors. Hearn (1996) notes that the term 'masculinity' is used imprecisely and to cover a wide range of meanings and describe radically different social phenomena, often slipping between masculinity as identity and ideology: 'many descriptions of masculinity are really descriptions of popular ideologies about the ideal characteristics of 'men' (*Ibid*: 207). Hearn questions the value of the concept of masculinity, suggests that we should define it more carefully and reasons that 'it is generally preferable to move from "masculinities" back to "men"' (*Ibid*: 214).

The social constructivists' attempt to find a middle way between a determined view of masculinity, and one that draws on psychoanalytical concepts of projection and unconscious desire and anxiety, appears to be ultimately unrewarding. Given that the kinds of projections onto the 'other' seem to be consistent in all the research, we are still left with the conundrum of why it is that boys as a group appear to have the same projections. The anxieties, fears and projections themselves seem to be socially determined. Lyth (1989) showed how psychological processes are integral with sociological ones – the way we interact is inseparable from both social beliefs and defence mechanisms like splitting and projection because what is projected or denied is influenced by social values. Thus we are left with the initial problem: how is it that these particular projections arise? It seems we are left with the answer that they serve the interests of particular groups and social orders.

49 i.e. we can find the 'true' explanation.

Masculinity studies spread rapidly during the 1990s and has also been criticised by feminists. Modleski (1991) insists that it threatens to reverse the accomplishments of feminism and turn the spotlight back on men and male anxieties – an argument echoed by Adams and Savran (2002):

Does masculinity studies represent a beneficial extension of feminist analysis or does it represent a hijacking of feminism? In short, what is gained – and what is lost – when a field that had been defined as women's studies, understood as both a theoretical and politically activist insurgency, changes its focus to examine the construction of those subjects who historically have subjugated women? (*Ibid*: 7).

The work of social constructivists (Mac an Ghaill, 1996; Brod and Kaufman, 1994; Connell, 1995) has led to theorising masculinities in the plural. Challenging binaries, wherein one polarity is dominant, more highly valued and more powerful, is a postmodern endeavour. Clearly it leads to the suggestion that either there are more than two masculinities and femininities, or less than two. If there are multiple masculinities this raises the question of how many masculinities there are? (Hearn, 1996) and what they have in common? If there are more than two masculine identities, we are still left with identity politics – there are just more differences to organise hierarchically. Arguing that there are multiple masculinities does not begin to challenge the male/female binary or the power relations inherent in this binary: on the contrary it reinforces the notion that all these masculinities have something in common that is different from what femininities have in common, and that masculinity is something that only men possess. MacInnes writes: 'It is remarkable how seldom writers on masculinity explicitly indicate what kind of concept they take masculinity to be...' and answers the question of what masculinities have in common with the answer: 'it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that all they have in common is possession of a penis' (MacInnes, 1998: 63). McMahon (1993: 690) quotes Kimmel (1987) who defines masculinity as 'what it means to be a man', but McMahon argues that this still leaves the matter rather open (*Ibid*). MacInnes (1998) raises several problems in relation to masculinity:

- What is it and why is it so difficult to define?
- What is male about masculinity? Male is biological – masculinity is social – why are males masculine and not females?
- If there are multiple masculinities how do they relate to each other, and in turn to men's dominance over women?
- How is it that a system that does not depend on biological difference nevertheless leads to oppression of one biological sex by the other?
- If oppression of women within patriarchy is based on biology (possession of a penis), this is a good explanation for why oppression occurs (but difficult to see how it could be brought to an end), If men's power is based on the phallus as a symbol of socially and historically created

structures, we have a good explanation of how it can be brought to an end but little scope for explaining why men exercise power over women.

Masculinity studies challenges the essentialist arguments that underpin the current boys' 'underachievement' discourse, and the current popular solutions to this perceived problem. It highlights complexity and diversity, and in this respect is congruent with postmodern feminism. However, it remains modernist in relation to the stress on agency and the subject; its analysis of power as 'power-over' and its use of hegemony theory: its uncritical search for the 'truth' of masculinity, and lack of attention to epistemological and ontological issues. For example, masculinist studies have not questioned the construction of knowledge about men and masculinity: why certain research questions are raised, while others are not:

Given the promising start, it is painful to survey the field of masculinities theory and research now: underdeveloped, with significant lacunae, and some 15 years behind feminist philosophy. Part of the explanation lies in the intense conservatism and economic rationalism of the late 1980s and 1990s; however this cannot be a full explanation (Star, 1999: 37).

Petersen (1998: 6) contends that, despite protestations to the contrary, the term 'masculinities' is still essentialist, and that essentialism and universalism are intrinsic to Western thought: only a radical change in epistemology will eliminate them.

7.4 Deconstructing masculinity

The final position outlined in this chapter is Deconstructivism. The main argument of the deconstructivists is that gender, masculinity and femininity are imagined, do not exist in reality, that these discourses exercise power, and are central to continuation of oppressive practices and social control.

Male deconstructivists build on the work of postmodern feminists. Like social constructivists discussed above, postmodern feminists emphasise plurality rather than unity, 'reject conceptions of women as a homogeneous category' (Beasley, 1999: 81) with a single essential identity (Harding, 1986), and are critical of the way in which a universalising principle (all women are the same) leads to negative judgments about non-conformity and to hierarchical positions of domination and subordination⁵⁰. However, postmodern feminists go further and 'challenge the fixity and hence the very status of established categories like sex, class and race/ethnicity' (Beasley, 1999: 82). For example, Fausto-Sterling (1993) argues that sex itself is a social construction, and Halberstam (2002) claims that masculinity is as much a property of women as

⁵⁰ see Signs, no 13: 405-37 'Cultural feminism versus post structuralism', and Feminist Studies (1988) vol. 14, no. 1. (Special issues on feminism and deconstruction).

it is of men. In the 1990s and early 2000s feminist writers examined the shaky divisions between male and female, femininity and masculinity:

Despite the fact that we live in a culture devoted to the idea that there are two sexes, bodies do not always oblige. Biology gives the lie to the cultural demand that a person be either male or female (Adams and Savran, 2002: 338).

The biologist Fausto-Sterling (1993) suggests that the concept of sexual differentiation has altered over time. The contemporary dichotomy between male and female is not a universal constant, but a result of social norms that are buttressed by medical practice (Fausto-Sterling, 2000: 30-44). She argues that biological variation implies the possibility of five sexes (the usual two, plus female pseudo-hermaphrodites, male pseudo-hermaphrodites and true hermaphrodites). Butler (1990), Sedgwick (1990) and de Lauretis (1991) also draw on postmodern ideas to contend that sexuality/ sexual identity is not fixed or inherent. 'Queer Theory' questions both essentialist and social constructivist frameworks. The latter are contested because they preserve some elements of essentialism. For example, social constructivists recognise the social rather than innate character of homosexuality and that sexual desire is malleable, but nevertheless portray the category, lesbian, as an inherent identity that is external to power and resists it. Queer theory stresses fluidity of sexuality and sexual identities.

As shown in chapter two postmodernism in all disciplines is allied with a rejection of fundamental truth, essence and certainty and a concern with indeterminacy, complexity, multiple determinants, diversity, and plurality. From a postmodern perspective truth is not eternal or impartial. As pointed out in chapter two, postmodernists are critical of modernism, which they see as linked with certainty, a simplistic search for 'truth' and singular causality. Postmodern feminists argue that the search for truth is not neutral but has a male bias, which is linked to power. Postmodern feminists, therefore, do not seek for explanations of macro phenomena. From a postmodern perspective masculinist theorising is itself universalising, totalising, authoritarian and 'modernist' in its search for the 'truth' of masculine identity. Postmodernists are critical of humanist conception of an essentially 'rational' universal human nature drawn from Enlightenment thought, and seek to expose problems within humanistic thinking that presume commonality between people or groups of people (Barrett and Philips, 1992). While the social constructivist position stresses plurality, it nevertheless is concerned with identity *as a man*. 'Identity politics' which produce a sense of belonging to any particular group is criticised because it reinforces the idea of being 'male' when the concept of 'masculinity' is itself socially constructed. Thus some postmodern feminists argue for abandoning all notions of identity including sexual and gender identity (Lattas, 1991).

MacInnes, like postmodern feminists, deconstructs the notion of masculinity/ies:

... 'gender', together with the terms masculinity and femininity, is an ideology people use in modern societies to imagine the existence of differences between men and women on the basis of their sex where in fact there are none (MacInnes, 1998: 1).

Male deconstructivists, like their feminist counterparts, propose that concepts of 'masculinity/ies' are flawed both in terms of their explanatory power and as frameworks for work toward social equality. Deconstructivists argue that focusing on difference between men and women contributes to perpetuating inequality, division and entrenchment. In reality there is no 'difference' in terms of mental, emotional or social functioning: men and women are the same. From this perspective the differences between women and the differences between men are greater than the differences between men and women. Since masculinity is an ideological construct that does not exist (and by association, nor does femininity) it is meaningless to define, illuminate or look for multiple versions of it.

Deconstructivists examine and critique social arrangements that create oppression (outlined in chapter eight), and the abuse of power encouraged by these systems, while simultaneously refusing dualist notions such as 'masculine' and 'feminine'. Like the social constructivists discussed in the previous section, deconstructivists view 'masculinity' as an ideology, rather than an essential quality. However, while social constructivists believe we *are* socially constructed, and describe masculinity/ies and the structural and agency devices through which 'masculinity' is formed, deconstructivists dispute the imagined *belief* that masculinity and femininity exist, contest the discourse that produces this belief, and examine the context within which the discourse is constructed. For example, we could not imagine ourselves as 'masculine' or 'feminine' if this concept were not available to us. The question then, is "Why and how has a *belief* in masculinity/ies and femininity/ies arisen?"

MacInnes argues the function of the discourse of masculinity is to help individuals make sense of inequality in a society that claims to be formally egalitarian. He contends that this gives people psychological defences against the 'terrors of modernity' – what he calls psychic insecurity. Under patriarchy oppression of women by men was justified by the idea of biological difference and superiority of males. In late modern society oppression is justified by the social construction of difference. Gender was invented (along with masculinity and femininity) as a solution to the problem of explaining men's greater power, resources and status without recourse to the patriarchal assertion that men's innate difference to women gave them a natural right to rule them. Gender, masculinity and femininity are ideologies, which justify the continuation of oppressive practices in modern society, which is formally committed to

equality⁵¹ (perhaps, however, the growth of new essentialist arguments will be used once again to argue for 'natural' superiority, in which case 'gender' will no longer be necessary). If gender was imagined as the cause of sexual division of labour, it could be thought of as socially constructed (the result of contrasting gender identities into which men and women were socialised) and therefore compatible with a modern Universalist society. Without gender the sexual division of labour must be the result of natural differences between men and women, and patriarchy must be inevitable. If 'gender' did not exist, the continued existence of inequality between men and women in modernity would need to be explained in terms of sex, thus demonstrating that claims that society was equal and universal, were false (MacInnes, 1998). MacInnes asserts that the 'crisis of masculinity' results from the 'fundamental incompatibility between the core principle of modernity that all human beings are essentially equal (regardless of their sex) and the core tenet of patriarchy that men are naturally superior to women and thus destined to rule over them' (*Ibid*: 11).

Masculinity, along with the complementary concepts of femininity and gender, can only be understood as ideological mechanisms that are the product of a very specific set of historical circumstances: an era in which men and women attempt to reconcile two quite contradictory views about the significance of their biological sex. These are that all men and women are fundamentally equal ... and that men and women, as two naturally different sexes, are fundamentally different. Gender thus comprises two diametrically opposite beliefs – that masculinity is socially constructed and that masculinity is naturally determined. Without these two ideas masculinity as a concept does not work (MacInnes, 1998:24).

It is useless to think of resocialising men and producing an alternative 'masculinity' (since it doesn't exist in the first place) and more useful to challenge the sexual divisions of labour in society:

Men simply do not possess such a thing as 'masculinity' as an aspect of their self, produced by conscious socialisation processes of which people could become fully aware and that they might therefore reform under the guidance of a politics of identity... Rather than writing manifestos for masculine or feminine selves, which hold out the illusory prospect of finding a path to wholeness, integration and freedom from anxiety, limit or disappointment, we should pay more attention to equalizing the material contexts of the development of males and females... tackling material inequalities in the relative position of men and women is more likely to bring about change...than attempts to reform men's selves, personalities or identities (MacInnes, 1998 149-151).

MacInnes (1998) also utilises the psychoanalytical concept of projection. But whereas social constructivists argued that projection and splitting are mechanisms through which masculine identity *is* established, MacInnes argues that it is the *belief* that masculinity/ies and femininity/ies exist which provides the function of dealing with existential anxiety by projecting

51 Similarly, 'race' is an ideology, developed by white people to justify oppression of black and minority ethnic people, whereas under patriarchy it could be justified by biological superiority of white people.

unwanted qualities onto 'The Other'. While the social constructivists believe masculinity/ies *are* socially constructed, the deconstructivist position states that we *imagine* masculinity/ies are socially constructed, and imagine that we can socially reconstruct ourselves.

This politics of identity... has as its common core, the assumption that the self or identity is essentially socially constructed, and that political and social progress can be achieved by the reflexive reconstruction of the self along the right lines. In this sense the politics of identity and this emphasis on the social construction of the self is the contemporary intellectual descent of the tradition of Hobbes and the other social contract theorists who first tried to see the self as a *tabula rasa*, made by contract rather than defined by nature (*Ibid*: 135).

Craib (1994) criticised this post-Enlightenment belief that we can do emotional labour on ourselves by imposing our own inner personal order – a belief in the 'powerful self'. Wrong (1961) named this belief the 'over socialized conception of man'. Following Craib, MacInnes argues that we might draw a more pessimistic conclusion about the politics of identity: self-reflexivity in fact comprises the further development of what Weber thought of as the 'iron cage' of modernity (Weber 1939). Self-reflexivity, rationality and personal authenticity have become an obsession, MacInnes suggests, at a time in late modernity when capitalism needs flexible and reflexive workers. The search to understand masculine identity/ies can be seen as part of this obsessive focus on self.

From a structuralist perspective a search to understand the self is, in any case, irrelevant, since individual agency, action and subjectivity are determined through social organization. From a poststructuralist perspective, the social constructivist notion of interplay between structure and individual agency in the construction of masculine identity is also rejected since identity is constituted by discourse. People are who they are – they think what they think, know what they know, say what they say and do what they do because of the discourses (sometimes competing) that are available to them (Jones, 1993).

What is the purpose of new essentialism and masculinity studies?

This chapter explored contrasting discourses of masculinity produced since the early 1990s. It begins by examining new essentialism, with its return to an emphasis on 'natural' masculinity and biology as an explanation for perceived difference between men and women. New essentialism and masculinity studies have in common an acceptance of difference between men and women, although they disagree on how and why they are different. They also disagree on the extent to which men have a common identity and the extent to which women have a

common identity. Unlike deconstructivism, neither position challenges the problems posed by the *concept* of identity⁵².

MacInnes explores the historical conditions that encourage men and women to imagine the existence of masculinity and femininity in order to make sense of their lives. He relates social identity to the emergence of rationalisation, markets and exchange, which resulted in freeing social relations from religious faith and enthralling them to pressures from the public sphere – either as members of organisations (such as the workplace) or as citizens of a state which commanded their loyalty, or as buyers and sellers in markets in ‘over’ developed countries. Writing about ‘race’ and racial identity, Gilroy (2000)⁵³ argues that identity provides an anchor in the ‘turbulent waters of de-industrialisation and the large-scale patterns of globalisation and economic reorganisation. Identity can hold these historic, but anxiety producing processes at bay’ (*Ibid*: 107):

The special appeal of individuality-transcending sameness still provides an antidote to the forms of uncertainty and anxiety that have been associated with economic and political crises. The idea of fundamentally shared identity becomes a platform for the reverie of absolute and eternal division (*Ibid*: 100).

He maintains in relation to the politicisation of gender and sexuality that ‘the anxious, disciplinary intensity with which these ideas (ideas about identity) are entrenched seems to increase in inverse proportion to the collapse of family and household structures and the eclipse of male domestic domination’ (Gilroy, 2000: 107). Identity has thus become an ‘obsessive preoccupation’ in overdeveloped countries:

In this light, identity ceases to be an ongoing process of self-making and social interaction. It becomes instead a thing to be possessed and displayed. It is a silent sign that closes down the possibility of communication across the gulf between one heavily defended island of particularity and its equally well-fortified neighbors... otherness can only be a threat. Identity is latent destiny. Seen or unseen, on the surface of the body or buried deep in its cells, identity forever sets one group apart from others who lack the particular, chosen traits that become the basis of typology and comparative evaluation (*Ibid*: 103-104).

A preoccupation with identity occurred when spiritual and religious ideas about selfhood were replaced with the belief that stability and coherence of self was dependent on authoritative and reliable truth seeking activity:

52 Although not necessarily made explicit, there seems to be an underlying presumption in ‘natural’ masculinity and social constructivist positions, that masculinity is more problematic for men than femininity is for women (Segal, 1990: 290). This is often explained as arising from an erosion of traditional class-based identity and increasing male unemployment (Seidler, 1992): ‘Since men identify with “what we do” this has resulted in a form of psychic death and a constant reminder of how empty masculinity is’ (Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002:51).

The idea of a pre-given, internal identity that regulates social conduct beyond the grasp of conscious rejection has been valuable in restoring elements of increasingly rare and precious certainty to a situation in which doubt and anxiety have become routine (*Ibid*: 108).

The deconstructive perspective, unlike previous perspectives, starts from the premise that there are no differences between men and women aside from complementary reproductive capacities. A focus on identity (masculinity(ies) or femininity(ies)) perpetuates rather than challenges inequality. Deconstruction suggests that a focus on identity in late modernity is no accident – concepts such as 'gender', 'masculinity' and 'femininity' are ideologies, which are imagined in order to escape from the existential fears that are an inescapable part of the human condition in modern capitalism (MacInnes, 1998) and as intrinsic to nation building (Gilroy, 2000):

Gender differences become extremely important in nation-building activity because they are a sign of an irresistible natural hierarchy that belongs at the centre of civic life...The integrity of the nation becomes the integrity of its masculinity (*ibid*: 127).

It seems reasonable to suppose that discourses that emphasise certainty, solidarity, similarity (and although social constructivism emphasises difference *between* men, it is founded on understanding of *men and women as different*) will become particularly important at times of flux and uncertainty: chapter eight outlines some of these contemporary events.

Chapter Eight: The changing economic, social and educational context for work with boys since the mid-1990s.

8.1 Introduction

This chapter, framed by the archaeological method, involves a study of the necessary conditions that constitute specific ways of thinking and talking about boys. Prevalent contemporary discourses propose that by the mid-1990s women had achieved equality in education, employment and society; boys and men were in trouble (see Appendix 2), and that study of masculinity or brain difference were important arenas of research in the pursuit of explanations.

The chapter examines the changing economic and educational context for these discourses, including to the structure of the economy in 'late modern' or 'postmodern' Britain; globalisation; market principles applied in education and health; changes in social relations and the composition of households; changes in democracy and decision making processes; decentralisation and closer ties with the European Union. Lawton (2005: 98) summarises four themes that dominated the world scene during the 1980s (Thatcher Tory government years⁵⁴): dramatic changes within communist regimes (leading to the communist block, including China, moving toward a market economy and other features of capitalism); improving co-operation between East and West (the end of the 'cold war'); instability, especially in Africa and Asia; and problems in the Middle East. Lawton points out that all of these events, together with rising unemployment in manufacturing in the 1980s, had a profound effect on UK resources and finances.

In education, there was a growing preoccupation with benchmarking, training, outcomes, target setting and a move away from 'equal opportunities' to inclusive education. Local Management of Schools (LMS) resulted in individual schools having control of their own budget, and many decision-making powers and resources being removed from Local Education Authorities. The media also had a role to play in public perceptions of equal opportunity policy making at LEA level; many Labour LEAs, implementing equal opportunity policies in the 1980s, were lampooned by some media as the 'loony left' (Myers, 2000: 11, 117, 118). It will be argued that these conditions form a grid of inter-related regulations that led to the discourses and solutions outlined in chapters five, six and seven.

⁵⁴ The Tory Party, led by Margaret Thatcher, came to power in 1979, and remained in power until 1997.

Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister between 1979-1990.

8.2 The economy and employment in postmodern UK

Chapter seven highlighted the deconstructivists argument that the obsession with identity (masculinity) provides security during turbulent processes of de-industrialisation and economic re-organisation on a global scale. In the last 30 years globalisation and technological developments have resulted in transformation of the UK economy, corresponding shifts in the working environment and patterns of employment.

(i) Globalisation and changes in the working environment

Globalisation refers to the increasing integration of national economic systems through the growth in international trade, investment and capital flow and improved information and communication technologies (Stephens 2000: 6). One of the fundamental consequences of globalisation is the loss of control that a country's government has over macro-economic policy, with resultant social impacts. Several colossal trans-national companies have turnovers that are higher than the gross domestic products (GDPs) of some countries. Because of this it has been observed that trans-national corporations, shareholders and investors, control the world (Stephens 2000: 7). These trans-national companies are inordinately powerful and are generally controlled by men. Connell (1995b) writes that these men own most of the world's wealth and are the main beneficiaries of globalisation in Western Europe and America. He points out that the richest fifth of the world's population receive 83% of total world income (United Nations Development Programme, 1992). The most striking feature of this accumulation and concentration of wealth is 'vastly increased power over the natural world and services of other people', including sex work (Connell, 1995b: 255). Versions of western patriarchal institutions are installed. As world capitalism has become more total, more local production systems are linked into global markets and local labour bought into the wage system (Connell, 1995b: 255). These institutions include corporations, state bureaucracies, armies and mass education systems. Power is realised in a number of ways – it sustains a level of material comfort previously available only to aristocracies.

Occurring in tandem with globalisation has been a huge advance in technology. In the workplace digital computer technology has had a massive impact including replacing manual functions on the shop floor and creating two classes of jobs: elite jobs for those who can programme and manage technologies, and service and maintenance jobs which are poorly paid and undervalued, for those who cannot. Information technology, communication technology and biotechnology have changed the way we live and work (Draper, 1991: 52). Technological progress in communication techniques is changing concepts of space and time. For example, the Internet transforms both the speed of transmission between people and the mobility of data. The

numbers of people involved in the transmission of data have also changed as the data-disseminating and data-making processes involve more and more people. In the past only a certain number of people in authority participated in the production of data to inform and an academic elite generally dominated this data production. In the 2000s the general public can participate in the generation and dissemination of data to inform (Lyotard, 1984: 4) and the validity of the data as knowledge no longer counts. Instead the public decides the validity of the information depending on its applicability. The huge increase in the number of popular web sites about brain difference between males and females (page 145) in the last five years is one example of this.

Knowledge has become the primary resource of the new economy. The 'knowledge economy' has been criticised as another form of commercialisation – knowledge is packaged and branded (Humes and Bryce, 2003) and produced in order to be sold and consumed, rather than as an end in itself (Lyotard, 1984: 4-5). In this 'knowledge economy' certain forms of knowledge are more highly valued, and Humes and Bryce (2003, 181) write that 'the current emphasis on competence-based qualifications, transferable skills and applied knowledge is consistent with the 'grand narrative' of emancipation through scientific progress linked to economic success'.

The shift from an industrial to a knowledge-based economy means profound changes in the ways we work, live and learn. 'As markets have become more global, competition has increased and there continues to be a steady drive for greater efficiency and increased productivity' (Lisle 1996: 229). However, we no longer need to travel to an office as remote working has become possible. 'Intangible resources such as information, organisational networks and human capital have become the primary sources of productivity and competitiveness' (Selzer and Bentley, 1999: 13). Within culture there is an unparalleled move toward an even more aggressive consumer culture (Lury, 1996; Featherstone, 1991; Corrigan, 1997; Slater, 1997) or lifestyle culture (Giddens, 1991; Edwards, 1997 and 2000). In population terms, the demographic structure is changing in relation to both the age group proportion and distribution of people in society.

Some writers are suggesting that the kinds of changes in the developed world outlined above are occurring in all aspects of society, including the economy, culture, values, technology and population trends, and are taking place at unprecedented speed. Rattansi and Phoenix (1997), for example, point out that late modernity is characterised by complexity and flux to a much greater degree than was the case in the preceding era. This speed of change is producing uncertainty and diversity (Smart 1992). Changes in the economy from an industrial to a post-industrial or knowledge economy produce demands for new skills and knowledge that are occurring with increasing frequency (Boud 2001). Barnett (1997 and 2000) argues that we are in a time of complexity, or even supercomplexity. Supercomplexity is the 'form of complexity

in which our frameworks for understand the world are themselves problematic' (Barnett, 1997: 11). Barnett (1997: 9) sees uncertainty as 'open-ended' in the sense that our frameworks can become problematic: what is certain in changing times may become uncertain. It seems consistent to speculate that speeding up of change is leading to acceleration in the rate at which discourses also change.

The next section turns to an examination of how changes in the economy outlined above have specifically impacted on men and women.

(i) Changes in patterns of employment

The overall impact has been a shift from an economy driven by manufacturing industry characterised by a mass, relatively homogenous, semi-skilled workforce towards economies dominated by employment in services associated with a more heterogeneous, fragmented workforce (Crompton *et al*, 1996: 3).

Department of Employment statistics show that at the beginning of 1980 seven million people were employed in the manufacturing industry, by 1992 there were only 4.5 million. Over the same period employment in non-manufacturing rose from 16 to 17.2 million. These figures show the rapid and substantial change from physical to mental work (Fingret and Smith 1995: 3-4). Alongside this, has been an increasing participation of women in the labour market, an increase in short-term and part-time working and, an increase in job instability and structural unemployment (Marmot 1998: 43). This has affected households differently, for example, in two adult households there has been an increase in the number in which both adults are employed. However there has been an increase in the number of single parent households. In these households there is a high level of unemployment, with a corresponding increase in class inequality (Condy, 1994).

The shift in the type of jobs available, away from manufacturing towards service jobs, is reflected in the drop in the number of men in employment since the 1970s. This has particularly affected working class men. Until the early 1970s, there had been a 'natural progression' for most young men moving from school into work. Irrespective of educational achievement, if young men stayed broadly within an acceptable framework of behaviour work would be available to them (Lloyd, 1999). Other changes highlighted in the section above, impact differently on men and women. These changes include:

- more jobs being concerned with information processing
- changes to working practices due to technological developments (Lipietz, 1992)
- changes in knowledge and skills, including technological, communicative and group work skills (Brown and Lauder, 1996).

According to the Annual Abstract of Statistics (HMSO, 1993) 90% of the new jobs created have been perceived as 'women's work' (low pay, part time, requiring small fingers). A similar percentage of lost jobs are perceived as 'men's work' (full time, wages high enough to keep a family, particularly skilled or manual labour):

Technological advances had reduced the number of jobs requiring physical strength, and had increased those requiring manual dexterity, and the capacity to manage and take responsibility. Technical innovation had limited the need for hands on and intensive housework. At the same time the numbers of women working as a matter of necessity to supplement low family income has increased significantly (Madden, 2000: 28).

The increase of women in the labour market is partly in response to the need for flexible workers, with 'feminine' skills. However, a global capitalist economy can only be sustained through increased consumption. Profit is made from persuading people to buy more goods or to pay for more services. Females are the main consumers of many services, and in addition are the people in a household most likely to spend on food, clothes and other disposable commodities. People are increasingly getting into debt, and rely on income from all adults in the family – the notion that the father is the 'breadwinner' is long past.

While more women participate in the economy the idea that women and men have parity at work is a myth: 'Thirty years after equal opportunities legislation was implemented in the UK, the position of men and women in the labour market shows resistance to significant, positive change' (EOC 1999). As highlighted in the introduction, there is little evidence that gains made by girls in school examinations are being translated into changes when they join the workforce. European legislation now requires that in principle all jobs in whatever sphere, should be equally open to women and men. However, jobs are still segregated along gendered lines. For example:

- 96% of engineering apprentices are male
 - 89% of health and social care apprenticeships are female
 - 79 % of computer analysts and programmers are men
 - 86% of primary and nursery teachers are female
- (Source EOC, 2001a)
- 4% of employed graduate engineers are women (WISE, 2001)
 - 1% of those working in childcare are men (DfEE, 1997a).

Women still continue to bear primary responsibility for childcare and those in full-time employment continue to earn 20% less than men in all ethnic groups (EOC 2000).

Some managerial and professional positions have opened up to middle class girls (Callender, 1996), but women are still less likely to advance to higher levels in their occupational choice. Women make up only 12% of partners in law firms (Hall, 1996) and 9% of university professors or principal lecturers (Morley, 1999). Adonis and Pollard (1997: 6) argue that in developed countries we now have 'a new super class of elite, top professionals and managers – exclusive, highly paid and increasingly divorced from the rest of society by wealth, values and lifestyle'. Professionals, assert Adonis and Pollard (1997) now have far less status and are paid less than this new elite in the financial and multinational sectors. Walkerdine *et al* (2001) suggest:

Women are thus being allowed to enter the professions at precisely the time when these professions are being devalued and high-flying men are going elsewhere. It is this new, largely male, super-class that eighteen years of Tory rule allowed to flourish and which continues under the politics of the new style 'third way', in which an autonomous, self-invented subject must be produced to cope with the terrifying uncertainties of the new labour market (*Ibid*: 7-8).

This 'autonomous, self-invented subject' is the same person as the reflexive, flexible worker identified by MacInnes (1998). His sense of self, especially his 'masculinity' is central to his feeling 'somebody' in the world, particularly since he is adrift without a religion, a community or an extended family. Connell (1995b) suggests that rapid change in the global order and the enormous growth of material power in metropolitan countries has been accompanied by an intensification of crisis tendencies in the gender order:

In this situation their (men's) own gender becomes an inescapable issue. The meaning of masculinity, the variety of masculinities, the difficulties of reproducing masculinity, the nature of gender and the extent of gender inequality all come into question and are furiously debated. I suggest that the growth of interest at this point of history is not accidental. The issue will not go away (Connell, 1995b: 257).

The next section describes how education has responded to the changing economic system.

8.2 Changes in Education

Educational reforms are situated in this larger social context and have become increasingly dominated by economic interests (Apple, 1992; Bastian *et al*, 1986; Giroux, 1984). Indeed Apple (1992: 779) writes that education became an 'economic tool' at the end of the 20th century. Davies (1992) describes the shift toward market values in education since the 1980s and the move away from equal opportunities:

In every advanced capitalist country...there is a restructuring of education, with similar features throughout. The features are: centralized control; decrease in educational expenditure; accentuation of horizontal and hierarchical divisions in education, reversing some of the progressive settlements of the 1960s and 1970s; greater emphasis on

vocationalism and instrumentalism; commodification of education (vouchers, marketing principles); increase in privatisation and links with the corporate sector; increased deskilling of the teaching force; a reorganisation of the patterns of teacher education; and a reconstitution of the “crisis” of schooling (Davies, 1992: 135).

In fact ideologies that questioned the social democratic principles and progressive settlements of the 1960s and 1970s appeared from the early 1970s. For example the Selsdon Group Manifesto (1977), basing their arguments on Hayek (Chair of the Adam Smith Institute), challenged the welfarist values of the post-war settlement and argued that the Welfare State was turning citizens into later day serfs through making them dependent on the state (cited in Morrell, 2000: 80):

What the public wants should be paid for by people as consumers rather than by taxpayers...the function of government should be not to provide services but to maintain the framework within which markets operate (Selsdon, 1977 cited in Morrell, 1989: 17).

Additionally The Black Papers (Burt, 1971) argued that intelligence was hereditary and corresponded to social class. In the 1980s ‘both the Adam Smith Institute and these campaigners whose slogan was summed up in the word ‘standards’, had the ear of central government, led by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’ (Morrell, 2000:81). However, policy changes based on these ideologies had to wait until the Tory government, elected in 1979, turned their attention to education and the 1988 Education Act. The changes instigated in this act were far reaching involving changes to management strategies, modes of surveillance, monitoring, evaluation and control of teachers and students (Ball, 1990; Hugill, 1991).

Each of these interventions has fed a specific construction of family and nation that lies at the heart of the New right philosophy....The success of this ideological strategy is evidenced in the increasing acceptance of the view that equal opportunities programmes promote “minority” interests, when in fact, if successful, they would benefit the majority of the population who are not white, male, heterosexual and able-bodied (Kelly, 1992: 20-21).

Writing about the US context, Apple (1992: 780) claims that the way we talk about reforming education ‘actually serves to divert our attention from many of the root causes of the problems we are experiencing’. These problems, writes Apple, are viewed differently from different ideological perspectives. From the progressive left, problems include an increase in poverty, reduction in funding for education and health, deskilling of jobs and lowering of wages, loss of whole sectors of industry, and destruction of communities in this process. From the right the crisis is constituted in the following ways: profits and production are not high enough, workers aren’t sufficiently disciplined, we are not competitive enough, people expect too much from the state, institutions including school are insufficiently economically competitive. Competition, accumulation, toughness and standards are the rhetoric of this rightist ideology. This more

powerful (than the left) contemporary discourse has moved away from redressing the imbalances in life chances, to provide the educational conditions believed necessary for increasing profit and capital accumulation, and returning the country to a romantic past notion of ideal home, school and family (Giroux, 1984). This ideology is reflected in policies and practices to raise standards, government intervention in curricular goals and knowledge, technicist management and evaluation practices originally developed in industry, and the pressure to make the perceived needs of business and industry the primary goals of school (Apple, 1992). Educational objectives, write Apple, include expansion of the free market, reduction of government responsibility for social needs, lowering of expectations for economic security, and popularisation of a form of Social Darwinist thinking (Bastian et al, 1986). Apple (1992) writes that the effects of this in the US include:

- the tendency for the curriculum to be rationalised and industrialised at a central level, largely focused on competencies measured by standardised tests
- more dependency on predesigned commercial materials and texts written specifically for those states that have the tightest centralised control
- the deskilling of teachers.
- problems relating to the kind of content being stressed in the curriculum

In the UK, too, this right wing ideology is shifting our beliefs about schooling from the notion of a common ground in which democracy is produced to the idea of a competitive marketplace⁵⁵. Critics of recent changes also argue that the notion of the citizen as a political being with reciprocal rights and duties has disappeared. In its place is the self as consumer. Schooling has become a 'retail product' (Apple, 1992; Bastian et al. 1986, Giroux, 1984).

In the UK a number of writers have argued that the 1988 Act was informed by the Neo-Conservatives' hostile response to equal opportunities, which they perceived as threatening traditional British cultural values and 'way of life' (Chitty, 1989; Hillgate Group, 1986; Kelly, 1992). Skeggs (1992) argued that the Education Reform Act (ERA) could be read as a specifically gendered piece of legislation, with the promotion of a sex/gender and 'race blind' curricular approach. He suggested it was part of a wider project aimed at constructing an alternative to the post-war settlement, with its underlying values of social equity and partnership. In relation to gender and education, the Tory government, and later the New

⁵⁵ The competitive education marketplace was recently strengthened by the publication of the White Paper in October 2005 allowing state schools to become even more independent from the LEA. Based on a rhetoric of parental 'choice' and 'freedom' schools will compete for the (ever more scarce) pupils through an open competition based on published test results.

Labour government since coming to power in 1997, replaced the notion of equality of education and social justice with its underlying 'politics of redistribution' back to a 'politics of difference' (Fraser, 1995). The Act included change to the function of the LEAs and Local Management of Schools, which involved schools taking control of their own budget. By the early 1990s 'central elements of the social democratic settlement were being dismantled, including the LEA-school partnership, comprehensive reorganisation, anti-racist and anti-sexist education' (Mac An Ghaill, 1994:17). OFSTED inspection of schools was extended to OFSTED inspection of LEAs and during the 1990s a number of LEAs were privatized. In London the GLC was abolished. The Thatcher government was committed to differentiation in school provision (a policy continued by the Blair government) and a number of specialist secondary schools were opened. Rather than a focus on equity and access, the focus after the 1988 Act shifted to raising standards through school improvement and effectiveness. This is measured through national testing, the data from which is used to compare the achievements of one school with another in relation to league tables of pupil results, purportedly to allow parents to judge the efficiency or otherwise of schools (Chitty, 2002: 66). The focus on 'standards' and 'achievement' is one of the key 'regularities' that has helped to construct the 'underachieving' boys discourse: national test results are analysed by sex, but not by minority ethnic or socio economic status.

This is the context for the development for discourses about boys and masculinity. The contemporary discourse of commercialisation, industrialisation and 'production' of schooling is the antithesis of the feminist discourse about schooling in the early 1980s, but it supports, is congruent with, and encourages the focus on achievement, testing and standards at the root of the boys' 'underachievement' crisis and the discourse of biological difference. It seems transparent that boys' 'underachievement' discourse serves to mask the reality: interest in equality, access, social justice and social democracy has disappeared from the educational agenda.

Part Three: What's The Problem?

The final part of this thesis is concerned with two major aims of this thesis and of policy archaeology: to study the purpose/social function of identifying boys as a problem, or as having problems, and to contribute to discussion about poststructural enquiry, 'reality' and 'realism' in research.

Chapter nine explores a number of compatible explanations for the contemporary interest in 'boys' problems', including a poststructural analysis based on ideas about disciplinary power and the role of discourse in regulating and normalising particular events. Chapter ten returns to the comparison made in chapter two between critical action research and poststructuralism as a way of further highlighting some difficulties with each. Finally, I reflect on my own learning and 'transformation' as a result of writing this thesis.

Chapter Nine: The purpose/social function of identifying boys as a problem, or as having problems

9.1 Introduction

In this thesis I have shown that from the early to mid-1990s discourses relating to gender and education changed from a focus on girls to one on boys, and from boys as a 'problem' to boys with 'problems'. From this time the media, and much boy-focused research utilised the discourse of boys' underachievement and poor performance. I showed in chapter seven that the two major competing discourses, new essentialism and masculinity studies, draw on a discourse of difference between boys and girls and identity politics. My research has not been concerned with providing 'evidence' about boys' behaviour, but women teachers *do* still describe differences in behaviour and learning approaches between girls and boys (chapter six). These differences have much in common with those described by women teachers in the 1980s (chapter three). However, while much of the behaviour described is the same as previously, there are some differences in the ways women teachers interviewed in 2003 talk about and understand boys. I have also shown that the educational and social contexts have changed. Following changes in the discourse, solutions to perceived 'problems' have also altered.

Postructuralism is concerned with disruption, discontinuity, and transformation between discourses. This thesis has above all highlighted such disruption in the discourse about gender and education. An archaeological analysis concentrates on *why* this disruption has occurred and what *purpose* it serves. Several answers to this question have been proposed. Warren (2002) identifies these as the inter-personal, institutional and macro-political contexts respectively:

- a backlash against feminism
- a backlash against radical educational policy and practice generally
- the effects of the postmodernist economy.

These explanations are not mutually exclusive and will be discussed in turn in this chapter. However, the chapter begins by summarising some of the objections to a boys' educational strategy.

9.2 Problems with a boys' educational strategy

Both the 'anti-sexist' and 'underachieving' discourses led to questionable policy developments. Difficulties relating only to the latter discourse include:

- A focus on 'achievement' support the notion that the main purpose of education is to get children to pass tests, and that these measure something called 'intelligence'.
- Whereas work with girls and boys in the 1980s was informed by feminism, the dominant UK strategy for work with boys (Reaffirming the boys) doesn't reflect contemporary academic research and theorising in masculinity studies, and is theoretically impoverished (Foster, 1994).
- As highlighted in chapter three and chapter seven feminist analysis and masculinist studies identified issues to do with the climate of the school as a learning environment and for the curriculum. Advocates of the 'underachieving boys' strategy have not addressed assumptions about rationality, meanings, or what knowledge is important (Foster, 1992a; Yates, 1993; McLean, 1995).

Further difficulties relating to both discourses are:

- By their nature interventions are short-term and compensatory. This means that they do not make lasting impact or lead to real change.
- Both are 'problem based' approaches to education. This augments the identification of some groups as superior and others inferior. Students are constructed as lacking.
- The historical concern within British education for the relationship between social class and educational advantage is marginalised (Warren, 2002:74).
- A boys' strategy does not acknowledge different access to privilege, and power in society (Foster, 1994). Nor does it recognise different experiences of schooling that different groups of children have.
- A boys' educational strategy implies an essentialist view of similarity between boys and ignores the social constructivists' argument that there are 'multiple masculinities'.
- A focus on the needs of any one social group, for example, boys or girls, is divisive and pits the needs of one group against another.

Connell (1994) claims that the notion of similarity between boys:

...will not wash....Nor can a strategy be based on the idea, which has run through conservative commentary from Sexton (1969) to the present, that boys have inherently different needs from girls. Who can define what they are? The massive evidence of historical and cross-cultural variations in masculinity....makes it extraordinarily unlikely that a set of educational needs, common to all boys and distinct from all girls, could ever be discovered (Connell, 1994: 17).

Partington (1985: 275), considered the curricular implications of feminism and multiculturalism, and highlighted that 'tensions exist at many levels of decision making in education between urging that all learners should be treated alike because they have common educational needs' and claims that 'each learner has unique educational needs which require separate treatment'. He distinguished two disputes – one about whether groups of people have sufficient interests, abilities or achievements in common to justify a specific curriculum or pedagogy for that group, the other about whether there are universal educational goods that all should have access to. He also wrote that both radicals (Gramsci, cited in Enwhistle, 1981) and conservatives (Cox, 1968, 1970) have argued for initiation into liberal knowledge, and that both radicals (Keddie, 1973) and conservatives (Bantock, 1970) have argued that different groups of children have such different needs that a common curriculum is not appropriate. A radical policy response to inequity has been to redress injustice by developing special programmes for disadvantaged groups: compensatory education in response to poverty, Afrocentric curriculum and bilingual education in response to racism, affirmative action programmes in response to sexism (Connell, 1994). However, Partington (1985: 283) asserts that radical/progressive arguments have been used to support apartheid, or 'separate development' of indigenous people (for example, in Australia and Canada) on the grounds of promoting cultures of these groups, although low educational achievement continues to be pervasive. On these grounds, any decision to develop separate programmes may merely contribute to further inequality.

The Education Reform Act of 1988 was largely responsible for the demise of equal opportunity work in UK schools. However, despite the narrow objectives driven and assessment-led curriculum, it appears to have benefited girls by ensuring that they studied a common curriculum until age 16. The consultation document on the National curriculum (DES, 1987) set out its position on equal opportunities in the following terms:

...all pupils, regardless of sex, ethnic origin and geographical location, have access to broadly the same good and relevant curriculum and programmes of study, which include the key content, skills and processes which they need to learn and which ensure that the content and teaching of the various elements of the national curriculum bring out their relevance to and links with pupils' own experiences (*Ibid*, 1987: 4, para 8.3).

The introduction of vocational courses at the beginning of the 2000s will undoubtedly ensure a return to stereotypical course choice (see page 242) and have a considerable impact on 'achievement' since a vocational G.C.S.E. is now worth two 'academic' G.C.S.E.s.

Problems with separate programmes for different groups of children lead to the argument for a

common curriculum for all pupils⁵⁶ that stems from recognizing common humanity and intelligence, empathy and understanding between people. It involves 'making a critical examination of existing culture and knowledge' and a curriculum that requires young people to 'learn to see the world from standpoints they regard as 'other', including those they despise or reject (Connell, 1994: 18 - 19). These goals are impossible to pursue in sex or ethnically segregated schools and classes.

Many writers have argued that justice should be the aim of education (Warren, 2002; Connell, 1994; McLean, 1995):

A good education is founded on social justice. If we are not pursuing gender justice in schools, then we are not offering boys a good education – though we may be offering them certain privileges (Connell, 1994: 17).

Kenway (1995) argues for a reciprocal unity across differences and Foster (1994) writes that what is needed is an educational strategy for all which includes changes at the epistemological level, promotes emotional learning and expressiveness, cognitive and social learning and facilitates all young people in considering how oppression and injustice operates in society, without laying blame on individuals or specific social groups. Both feminists in the 1980s and social constructivists in the 2000s (see chapter seven) argue that features of schooling reproduce inequalities, as well as undesirable values and behaviours and that changes in organisational policy, practice, and the curriculum, must be made. For example, in modern industrial societies and in their education systems, spiritual, emotional, physical and social attributes have traditionally been separated from the cognitive. Walkerdine (1984, 1990) maintains that the belief that individuals are rational, along with prioritising the cognitive, fits with ideologies and forms of social organisation beginning with industrial capitalism, especially the emergence of 'science' as a form of legitimation. These notions were aligned with the stress on competitiveness rather than co-operation.

Many authors in the last decade challenged the premise that competition is the dominant explanation for evolution and instead proposed co-operation as a better explanation (Lovelock, 1988; Maturana and Varela, 1988; Sheldrake, 1991). Despite this, competition is the linchpin of both the western economy and its education system:

Competition has characterised educational practice from its beginningsThis spirit of competition seems to go with our system of free enterprise and the American preoccupation with being number one (Davidson and Worsham, 1992: xi).

⁵⁶ Including non-separate education for children from different religious backgrounds and ethnic groups (Trefor Phillips recently suggested separate education for black Caribbean boys – see footnote 35)

Social justice requires schools to examine their curriculum and pedagogy for bias, and their management and decision-making processes for hierarchical, autocratic, non-inclusive practices. Perhaps most importantly, it requires teachers to constantly question their own biases, stereotypes, assumptions and prejudices, and teachers and policy makers to give social justice primacy in education for all children. Education to promote social justice is far removed from many of the 'common sense' solutions being offered to perceived problem of boys' 'underachievement' at present (chapter five), and from the perception of boys' sexism, leading to 'anti-sexist' work in the 1980s (chapter three) which failed to recognise the complexity and interrelatedness of different forms of oppression:

This study suggests the need to conceptualise a comprehensive and inclusive theoretical framework in which to locate anti-oppressive schooling. The mainstream Left's additive model, with its hierarchy of oppressions, is a theoretical, political and educational cul-de-sac with limited explanatory power, which has contributed indirectly to the maintenance of the New Right moral hegemony (Mac An Ghaill, 1994: 178).

Social justice recognises that all of us participate in forms of oppression, all of us are affected by oppression: all of us are both perpetrators and victims, and there is a need to acknowledge this and critically examine why it is so.

Webb (1996) reminds me, however, that ideas about social justice and co-operation are also socially constructed and are themselves problematic. They depend on a construction of 'other' and 'difference' that can be patronising: 'all the words which tend to appear on the side of the 'good and holy' ...are problematic and contestable' (*Ibid*: 150). Of course, a poststructuralist analysis would suggest that the discourse of equity and social justice also arises out of certain intersecting conditions. This 'grid of regularities' (Scheurich, 1997) makes specific ways of framing the world possible, and other ways impossible:

Once a discourse becomes 'normal' and 'natural' it is difficult to think and act outside it. Within the rules of discourse, it makes sense to say only certain things. Other statements and other ways of thinking remain unintelligible, outside the reaches of possibility (St. Pierre, 2000: 485).

This reminder that concepts such as social justice are themselves problematic gives rise to one of the criticisms of poststructuralism: that it does not lead to specific action, solutions or provide guidance for ethical and moral positions. This is discussed in chapter ten.

9.3 Why the concern about boys now?

Walkerdine *et al* (1989) raised the important point (in relation to girls' and women) that different questions will be asked at different times, and lead to different interventions:

... different concerns at different historical moments have themselves helped to produce different definitions of – and solutions to – the 'problem'. In other words, no single and unbiased research question will locate the absolute truth about girls and women. Rather, it is important to show how different kinds of questions lead to different interventions (*Ibid*: 6-7).

I showed in chapter four that early work on equal opportunities in large urban Labour-led education authorities initially focused on access, although feminist women teachers developed grass roots interventions based on more radical analysis of the operation of sexism – that is, the ways in which power operates to oppress women. Chapter four also pointed out that after the Second World War concerns had focused on the education of working-class boys, and then subsequently, in the mid-1970s, on girls. Walkerdine *et al* (1989) maintain that the way the problem of girls was framed deflected from the real nature of the debate. The concern, first expressed under Callaghan's government in 1976, was about 'wastage of talent', which led to young women not entering careers in mathematics and science. It was maintained that the concern was never about all girls, but only those doing GCE 'A' level and perhaps going on to University (*Ibid*). However, the problem was construed as a general one – if the 'cleverest' girls were failing, doubtless all girls were failing. Walkerdine *et al.* (1989: 11) maintained that in fact girls' 'mean scores in mathematics were roughly equivalent to those of boys, even in secondary school'. The differences between boys and girls ranged from one or two per cent to about eight per cent and were:

...considerably smaller than the differences between pupils living in metropolitan areas and those in non-metropolitan areas, and were totally swamped by differences between the regions of the United Kingdom or between schools having high or low percentages of free school means (Walkerdine *et al* 1989: 17).

In effect, the precise problem the research was established to explain was not there, although they did find that there was considerable difference in experience, performance, and attitude of girls from different socio-economic backgrounds. They suggested that categorical differences were politically important: crucially the differences that were ignored either did not have the same political significance, or were regarded as politically far more troubling – such things as class and geographical differences (*Ibid*: 17).

Patterns of achievement in terms of examination success are complex (see Appendix 2, page 238). The finding that socio-economic class is a far greater indicator of examination

performance is replicated by other research (Delamont, 2001). For example, research in Birmingham Education Authority found that poverty, ethnicity, season of birth, pre-school education, and family mobility have a greater impact on a child's educational progress than sex (Budge, 2000: 7). Additionally, achievement seems to be showing a widening gap in relation to social class and ethnicity (DfEE, 1999a; Demack *et al*, 2000; Gillborn and Mirza, 2000).

The evidence from Walkerdine *et al.* (1989) suggested that the apparent underachievement of girls in mathematics, as well as the perception that all girls were achieving less well than all boys were both fictions. Harrison and Hood-Williams (2002: 142) point out that there are important theoretical and methodological issues relating to whether or not a 'problem' or 'failure' exists in the first place, and if there is a problem, whether it is 'girl-specific or related to something else'. For example, if a difference in performance between girls and boys is perceived, it is assumed to be generalisable and results in a search for an explanation based on categorical difference:

Given that the problem was how to get a particular group of girls into specific careers, it is strange in retrospect that no one conducted research to see how typical this group of girls were and whether what was happening was related to their 'girl-ness' (Harrison and Hood-Williams, 2002: 142).

This raises the question: if underachievement of girls as a category was a fiction, what was the purpose or social function of identifying this problem at this time? Whose interests are served by identifying this as a social problem? This is one of the central questions of this thesis in relation to boys:

More recently, the anxiety has been over the performance of boys on scholastic tasks more generally. What is it about adolescent boys, or about the 'laddish' culture to which they belong, that leads them to fail in school? One might speculate about the complex of political concerns that have led to the identification of either one of these problems (*i.e. of girls achievement or boys achievement*). The important question, however, is how the problem comes to be constituted and, one might argue, to take on a life of its own, and it is here that a small amount of political information can reframe what is apparently a purely empirical debate (Harrison and Hood-Williams, 2002: 142).

It was shown on page 12 that evidence exists to show that girls' outperformance of boys in school has been recognised for well over 100 years, but what is important for this thesis is that boys' underachievement was not previously viewed as a social problem. Differences in achievement were commonly explained as arising from different maturation rates between girls and boys, and therefore not of concern. The 'problem' *for* girls, as perceived by women researchers and teachers, was not girls' attainment, but that girls did not participate in certain areas of the curriculum (mathematics and science), did not enter into certain areas of work (and still do not, see chapter eight and Appendix 2), and their aspirations appeared to be different

from boys' aspirations. The problem *of* boys in the 1980s was how they expressed their 'masculinity'.

The 'evidence' for negative attainment on which policy and practice is founded is part of a long tradition of sex difference research. As discussed in chapter four, the explanation for the presumed difference in achievement in the 1970/1980s was either biological, for example, differences in brain lateralisation and spatial ability, or in terms of sex-role theory, for example, experiences of socialisation resulting in a 'feminine' personality. Today, once again a biological discourse is prevalent, as shown in chapter six. Fuchs Epstein (1988) pointed out that there is a strong tendency to focus on differences (usually small) in average outcomes, and exaggerate these into block differences between boys and girls. She aptly called these 'Deceptive Distinctions'. Research on sex differences starts from the premise that such differences exist. It might examine the extent of differences, how they manifest and what causes the differences, but their existence essentially remains unquestioned.

...we might say of research into the differences between the sexes that it tells us more about the social, political and intellectual concerns that animate it than about the difference between boys and girls or women and men....Both in its more 'progressive' incarnations and in those that are regarded as less so, the research into the 'failure' of girls in respect of mathematics and science, which Walkerdine *et al.* (1989) describe, indicates the way in which that research, because of the very formulation of its research question, necessarily led to neglect disconfirming evidence because its orientation is towards a narrative of female failure (Harrison and Hood-Williams, 2002:144-145).

Curiously, recent attention to boys' performance is orientated toward a narrative of male failure and female success. If gender differences in achievement are much smaller than differences based on poverty, geographical location or ethnicity, then it is important to ask why the focus on boys' underachievement has arisen.

A backlash against feminism?

Several writers suggested in the 1990s that the identification of a 'crisis' in masculinity and boys' achievement; as well as discourses including new essentialism and masculinity studies is a backlash against radical educational reforms and advances made by women in education and society generally (Foster, 1992, 1994; McLean, 1995; Kenway, 1995).

Kenway (1995) discusses the reaction of some males to feminist reforms in schools as a defensive reaction to feeling under siege: various discourses associated with different masculinities are adopted as one subversive strategy. She argues that the current 'crisis' for men and boys has arisen because men feel threatened and that to understand this it is necessary to comprehend the full force of the feminist movement in education. Foster (1992) alleges that an

interpretation which sees girls succeeding at boys' expense is a plain expression of the fact that girls' education continues to exist in a framework in which boys and their education are *a priori* more important than girls and their education. Foster (1994) asserts that the current push for a boys' education strategy constitutes a reassertion of masculine norms and privilege in education. Parry (1997) makes the observation that the discourse of the 'problem' of boys' 'underachievement' actually works to accentuate the 'real' problem, that of girls *achievement*. It is difficult to escape the belief that the 'panic' about boys is actually part of a wider push to get women 'back' into the home. This sense arises from contemporary fixation on the harm working mothers cause their babies⁵⁷, and the mushrooming number of biological studies purporting male and female brain differences (a growth of 14,786,387 internet sites reporting these studies in less than five years, see page 145). Delamont (2001) wrote that as she was researching her book:

....there were authors claiming that one or other of two new sciences rendered feminism, gender studies and all social movements and social policy aimed at gender equality redundant. The new 'sciences' are....brain-based....or evolutionary...Exactly similar ideas were put forward at the end of the last century. There were moral panics about the feminisation of education, about the lack of a role for men, and claims that new work in bioscience 'proved' that feminism had been a terrible mistake....The end of a century, especially when there is any advance by feminism, always produces outbreaks of new pseudo-sciences claiming that any change in women's roles is doomed because it is 'against nature' (Delamont, 2001: 111).

As shown, some have argued that the changing patterns of employment (identified in chapter eight), and changes in the family resulting from increased divorce rates, produced cultural transformations and changes to certain male roles, particularly for men whose manual labour is the main spring of their masculinity (Kenway, 1995). Kenway suggests that as men lose power in one arena they search for new ways of displaying it in order to recoup their sense of manhood. Violence is one such expression, and the scapegoating of 'working women' or feminism is another. Kenway (*Ibid*) contends that certain men, living their lives through hegemonic forms of masculinity, see inequality as the right and proper order. Their masculine identity relies on women being subordinate socially, domestically and sexually. For such men, feminism does constitute a crisis unless it can be contained and policed (*Ibid*: 78).

In this reading masculinist study itself is interpreted as a strategic response to feminism as a means of preserving masculine privilege (Young, 1993: 318). Feminists point out that scarce resources for Women's Studies in Universities have been redirected toward masculinist study (Delamont, 2001). Other writers argue that masculinist study has failed to build on the recent work of feminist scholars (Star, 1999; Petersen, 1998). For example, social constructivist

⁵⁷ As I write (3rd October 2005) a seven-year study conducted by Penelope Leach, Kathy Sylva and Alan Stein was published. This study of 1,200 children purports to show that those whose mothers stayed at home

writing has failed to grapple with the assertion of some feminists that rather than biological sex causing gender (implying that sex is a natural category), sex itself is a social construct (gender precedes sex) (Delphy, 1993).

However, the argument that the current obsession with masculinity is a response to men feeling under siege from feminism is inadequate. In UK schools, as shown in chapter four, the focus on sexism and gender issues was a feature of urban, Labour led authorities only. Equal Opportunity work had largely disappeared with the advent of the National Curriculum, local management of schools, the disappearance of Equal Opportunity Inspectors and Advisory teachers by the beginning of the 1990s (Myers, 2000). This is not to say that some men, particularly the New Essentialists (page 143) do not *perceive* feminism as a threat, and girls' achievements in examinations a direct result of it.

A backlash against radical educational policy and practice generally?

Changes in education since the end of the 1980s can be seen not only as a critical response to feminism, but to progressive ideologies more generally. Apple's (1992) argument that the demise of many of the educational reforms achieved in the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s was achieved through a stress on the purely economic aspects of education, in turn part of a powerful right-wing political push in society more generally, was highlighted in chapter eight.

As summarised in chapter four, the discourse of equal opportunity, social justice and equity was the antithesis of the 1960s/1970s discourse of hereditary intelligence relating to social class (Morrell, 2000: 81). The return to essentialising and biological explanations for differences between the sexes supports the stress on economic aspects of education, and is a short step away from the 'rediscovery' of biological differences between 'races' and children from different socio-economic classes⁵⁸. In the discourse of biological essentialism, the role of the state is a paternalistic one – to enable access of the 'brightest' children to selective education. Social values in this discourse are not related to equity or social justice, but to 'fairness' – meeting the needs of children with differing abilities. This is another reminder that prevalent social values are themselves determined by the social context, rather than the outcome of autonomous, reflective and individual 'freely' chosen moral positions.

In the 1980s, under a Thatcherite government, anti-progressive ideas were gaining momentum. I

with them until they were three did 'significantly' better on developmental tests (Bale, 2005).

58 Research showing biological differences between gay and heterosexual people is well established (Petersen, 1998: 61-63).

highlighted on page 70, chapter four, that the introduction of sex, race and class policies, and gay and lesbian equality in left wing Labour Authorities was regarded as an attempt at undermining Thatcherite policy in the 1980s (Gyford *et al*, 1989; Leach, 1989; Mather, 1989). The 'backlash' against these Authorities in the late 1980s was also a backlash against the progressive policies themselves:

As regards education, left-wing councils' activities were tied to and dismissed as further examples of the problems with 'progressive' teaching (Leonard, 2000: 179).

Alongside the support these LEAs gave to equal opportunities and other work toward social justice, was a commitment to comprehensive schools, mixed-ability teaching, cross-curricular work, teacher autonomy, grass-roots intervention and teacher-led curriculum development. However, as pointed out on page 72, some commentators in the 1980s (Goldenburg, 1985: 22) argued that the LEA had put social class 'on the back-burner' because it was politically far more barbed than discussion of race and gender. Similarly the rhetoric of parental choice adopted by the Tory, and subsequently New Labour Parties, as well as that of boys' underachievement, could equally be argued to be more palatable discourses than that of working class underachievement.

However, a description of backlash in education is an unsatisfactory explanation for the perception that boys are in crisis (although it is noteworthy that many of the strategies outlined in chapter five fit conveniently into current anti-progressive discourses, including the discourse of 'standards', 'achievement' 'competition' and 'assessment'). From a poststructuralist perspective, the notion of 'backlash' implies agency, conscious intent on the part of a particular group of people, rather than the outcome of a complex network of relationships and regularities.

An outcome of the postmodernist economy? (The macro-political context)

A number of synergies between the economy and discourses about boys and masculinity have been highlighted in this thesis:

- i. discourses of male 'underachievement' successfully hide the shortage of jobs created by the shift from manufacturing to service industries in western economies
- ii. identity discourse serves the purpose of containing anxiety caused by economic reorganisation (MacInnes, 1998; Gilroy, 2000)
- iii. consumerism depends, and feeds on our sense of self: a preoccupation with identity is fundamentally a 'struggle for selfhood' (Wexler, 1992) involving an image of the kind of people we are

- iv. globalisation and the world economy require a flexible and self-reflexive workforce (McInnes, 1998): reflecting on selfhood necessarily involves reflection on gender identity
- v. discourses based on biological essentialist and reductionist arguments may easily be used to support those in power: the most powerful figures in global capitalism are men (Connell, 1995b)
- vi. the maintenance of social harmony and cohesion during a time of tumultuous economic re-organisation is paramount: discourses of male underachievement and masculinity successfully rally men *and* women to a worthy cause (improving the lot of boys). The feminist discourse was not nearly as successful in this respect – women rallied to the cause, but many men remained unconvinced, if not opposed
- vii. discourses of male ‘underachievement’ successfully fulfil the purpose of controlling, regulating and normalising productivity and productive citizens.

The following represents my attempt to identify the purpose of identifying boys as a problem and a ‘crisis’ in ‘masculinity’ from a poststructuralist perspective by expanding on the last of these explanations.

In ‘The Order of Things’ Foucault (1973) studies the conditions possible for the emergence of ‘man’ a subject of study. In this sense, of course, Foucault is interested in the emergence of the study of *self (of humankind)*. However, the development of masculinist study involves quite literally men turning themselves into subjects. Scheurich (1997: 85) writes that:

The heart of the Western knowledge project, which includes both conventional and postpositivist orientations, is research. The purpose of research is to study the world (the Other), organize that world through a theory (reform or reshape the Other into the Same), and produce a written text communicating the victory of the Same over the Other.

This view is echoed in Spivak’s (1988: 104) assertion that ‘the desire to explain (through research is)...a symptom of the desire to have a self (the researcher) that can control knowledge and a world that can be known (i.e. converted to the Same), and to hooks (1992) notion of ‘Eating the Other’. Perhaps a logical outcome of this research endeavour in postmodern society is ‘Eating the Self’? These notions relate to Foucault’s genealogy, that is the relationship between power and knowledge. At the centre of Foucault’s work is a concern that ‘the processes by which the human subject has been able to articulate ‘the truth’ about itself in forms of knowledge have as one of their key determining elements relations of power’ (Smart, 1985: 141). Star (1999: 40) explains that Foucault characterised the modern episteme as concerned with ‘productive power’ whose creation was the individual ‘self’:

...this new account emphasised the interiorisation of discursive 'disciplines', and the creation of 'inscribed' or 'docile bodies' within powerful new 'technologies of identity'. Reframed notions of bodies, desires, and behaviours as identities...were as much self-imposed through interior confessions and self-surveillance, as socially trained within families, schooling, workplaces, psychiatry, courts, etc. Under panoptic regimes the individual's experience of actual or potential surveillance by authorities leads them to act routinely *as though observed* (*Ibid*: 40).

Foucault utilises the concept of genealogy (the relationship between power and knowledge) to show how discursive practices lead to conformity; objectification (becoming the subject of knowledge) produces power. This is 'disciplinary power'. Disciplinary power was discussed in chapter two, page 26 and works by observing, measuring and making judgements about individuals to exercise control through creating regimes of 'truth' that impose *self-discipline*. This pertains to Scheurich's notion of productive behaviour:

Problems and problem groups are social constructions. The primary function of these constructions is not for the purpose of solving the problems or disciplining and normalizing the problem groups. Instead, the primary function of these social constructions is to provide a definition of correct, productive behaviour to citizens who are already acting in concert with the social order (Scheurich, 1997:111).

'Productive' is a code for congruence with the larger social order. Productive citizens play a positive role: do not break rules, are not disobedient, go to work on time, are not disruptive – on a daily basis. Being a productive citizen means one is aligned in thought and deed with the social order (Scheurich, 1997: 116). Some researchers suggest that new spaces for women's social and economic improvement connect with social construction of schoolgirls as 'quiet', 'sensible', 'mature', 'hardworking' (Francis, 2000). In new context these constructions seem to benefit the economy, while constructions of 'masculinity' may not.

As suggested above, the new economic order needs workers with skills that are associated with 'femininity' rather than 'masculinity'. Perhaps one of the social purposes of identifying males as the 'subject' of study operates in the same way as 'disciplinary power' to transform boys into more 'productive' citizens, while at the same time teaching females to return to the 'proper order' through the parallel message that they are 'too productive', 'too successful' and 'have it all'? Disciplinary power punishes non-conformity and has the effect of normalising events. One effect of the masculinity discourse, for example, has been to contribute to the normalising of achievement as the primary goal of education: 'productive' citizens pass examinations. The discourse is an example of Foucault's concern with the 'science of population management'. This operates through new forms of power that depend on population regulation through knowledges such as 'statistics, epidemiology, psychology, and developments in medicine, law and social welfare' (Walkerdine, 1989: 22).

It perhaps needs to be stated again, that from a poststructuralist perspective this discourse would not be deemed to result from a single cause or from conscious intent of any individual or group, but from a multiplicity of processes, and located in a complex field of relations (Smart, 1985). However, although the specific social order has evolved from a complex of regularities involving conflict, chance and error, the resultant discourse is itself inevitable, *proper*, and intrinsically related to the fundamental characteristics of the social context (Harrison and Hood Williams, 2002).

Final comment

This thesis has explored the idea that ‘problems’ are social constructions that arise in specific economic and social contexts. Discourses relating to boys, girls and their education, change and are themselves the outcome of social arrangements. I have demonstrated what kinds of concerns and questions were asked about boys in the early 1980s and in the 2000s and what kinds of interventions they led to. My epistemological standpoint in the 1980s reflected polarised views about men and women in society, which tended to valorise women and demonise men. I have highlighted that the solutions adopted by myself and other women teachers in the early 1980s were an outcome of feminist concerns about boys' behaviour, and initially focused on changing boys. A focus on boys with problems or as a problem is not helpful (nor is a focus on girls' problems or as a problem). Solutions to gender issues in education are not based on ‘truth’ but on discourse, therefore any solutions offered are partial and temporary. This is equally true for the arguments above for social justice and equity – these suggestions and values are formed within a particular milieu, and indeed reflect a modernist search for ‘solutions’ (discussed in section 10.1).

A search to examine and understand ‘masculinity/ies’ also arises from a modernist search for certainty, and deconstructivists (page 159) pointed to the need to question the usefulness of the concept of ‘masculinities’ (and by association, ‘femininities’ and ‘gender’).

Evidence suggests that there is not, and has never been a ‘male’ crisis, but, as indicated on page 12 there have been concerns about the ‘threat’ from anti-school working-class boys since at least 1680 (Pearson, 1983). Other writers make the same point:

It has become a cliché to argue that masculinity is in crisis. But although men's privilege is under unprecedented material and ideological challenge, the briefest historical survey will show that masculinity has always been in one crisis or another (MacInnes, 1998: 11).

A ‘crisis’ suggests a new, intense, short-lived problem, rather than an on-going permanent condition. Furthermore, the identification of a ‘male crisis’ suggests that there is not a

corresponding 'female crisis'. As indicated in Appendix 2, both young men and women experience tensions, anxieties and distress⁵⁹. Although it is expressed in different ways, its root may be very similar, and may be partly caused by the extreme pressure in western capitalist society to meet defined images of acceptability. In this reading, if there is a 'crisis' for boys, there is also a crisis for girls: this is likely to be from living in a postmodern economy, or a time of rapid change and uncertainty. It has been argued that the possibility of perceiving a 'problem' in boys' achievement has not arisen because boys' underachievement is a 'fact', but because specific social conditions have come together at a specific historical moment, to enable this perception, including in the economy, in society and in education.

⁵⁹ Again, as I write, the front page of *The Independent* reports a survey warning of 'a mental health time bomb' affecting both young men and young women, with drugs, alcohol, underage sex and an 'ever growing obsession with body image' and 25% of 15 year old girls considering killing themselves or having 'indulged in significant attempts at self harm' (Thompson and Woolf, 2005: 1).

Chapter Ten: Reflections on the Research

10.1 Issues in this research

As well as changing the way we think about gender and education, poststructuralism suggests a change to the way we think about research. This chapter is concerned with changes to my thinking since conducting the feminist critical action research in the 1980s.

Writing about bias in qualitative research has tended to focus on such things as the research sample, however, poststructuralists would agree that bias occurs at an earlier stage in the choice and design of the research, which leads us to ask certain questions and avoid others, or alternatively, not even realise that a particular question needs to be asked (Ball, 1995). Action research in the 1980s, described in chapter three, confirmed a perception that the majority of women experience harassment from boys and that many boys behave in 'sexist' ways. However, this research also indicated that some men in boys' schools also experience a lack of respect, hostility and harassment. At the time I did not pay attention to this finding, write about it or conduct research with men. This narrowness of focus is an example of the partial nature of research. This is inevitable and crucial for researchers to recognise. Because the focus of the action research described in chapter three was on women, the research itself could be argued to contribute to division because it polarised the experiences of men and women teachers.

The action research described in chapter three took a 'problem solving' approach - the problem of boys. Most definitions of action research define it as problem solving (Zuber-Skerritt, 1996: 3). Problem solving raises issues about how the problem is identified and by whom. One of the basic tensions in action research is that it *is* problem based. Winter, (1996) asks:

At any one time, we are likely to be aware of countless problems to which our current practices are only questionable and provisional solutions. But, in a way, this range of possibilities creates a difficulty as to which, of the many problems to select for the sustained attention, which an action research project requires. The simple answer is that we decide what seems 'interesting'. But this merely serves to renew the question: what is the nature of our 'interest'? (Winter, 1996: 14-15).

Winter points out that our interest reflects such things as 'emotions, motives, unconscious memories, ambitions, irrational anxieties, overarching beliefs and half-glimpsed insights' (Winter, 1996: 15). He suggests that 'genuine progress' will only result from going beyond what is already familiar to find points where we have genuine uncertainties. It is interesting to reflect, that at the end of action research in WBS in 1984 the problems experienced by women in boys schools were familiar, yet as an Advisory Teacher I continued to gather more evidence of these problems. This suggests, in retrospect, a commitment to 'proving' an analysis of male sexism and of boys' schools as 'masculinising' institutions, rather than problematising this position.

Perhaps the reluctance to problematise our position is an outcome of the modernist endeavour described above, where the researcher searches for certainty, and expects to find it, rather than uncovers complexity and more questions, which need to be asked. The action research in WBS between 1982-1984 appears to fulfil the goal of uncovering uncertainty and complexity more satisfactorily than that to inform my work as an Advisory Teacher between 1984-1986, since the former did lead to a change in perspective: the action research process applied to SfL in Woodland Boys' School resulted in movement toward more empathic relationship with the boys - as evidenced by more stress on collaboration and relationships, and toward identifying gender regimes in school. This was because, as well as conducting action research, I was a classroom teacher and a form tutor. On leaving WBS to become an Advisory Teacher the research process resulted in a shift back towards seeing boys and men as the problem. I believe this was because boys and men were excluded from the research process, apart from as a 'problem' group, and also because I was no longer working as a classroom teacher of boys. The research only focused on women's problems *with* boys and men. The focus was also related to the historical and social context. Gender issues in the Education Authority were being given a greater priority. For example, the formation of the LEA equal opportunity team reflected the increasing prominence of feminist scholarship and research. In addition money was made available for projects focusing on girls and women (for example Equal Opportunity Commission funding of WISE, GIST, and SfL, pages 76-77).

'Data' collected in the 1980s, shows that boys were viewed as a unified category (as they are in much of the contemporary literature on 'failing boys'). As described in chapter three, the behaviour of some boys was shocking to the researchers. Clearly, not all boys harass, are rude or disrespectful. At the outset of the case study in WBS I had previously taught in boys' schools and noted that boys in single-sex schools appeared to be more aggressive toward one another and their women teachers. However, I did not come to WBS with a strongly developed sense of male injustice toward women. After four years of focusing on anti-sexist work with boys, I was steeped in the gender and education discourse and *was* more inclined to focus on difference between men and women: my ideological position had shifted further toward an anti-male position. From my current perspective I agree with Winter that:

We can therefore easily set up our research so that it confronts one ideology (which we oppose) from the standpoint of another (which we share). In the end, this is somewhat inevitable, but the immediate problem is that we risk not learning anything new; instead, we simply rehearse a familiar debate, armed with fresh evidence from well-worn categories. If research is to be worth the effort, it needs to offer the prospect of going beyond competing ideologies, to offer the possibility of changes in our thinking and practices (Winter, 1996: 18).

A problem solving approach implies that the problem is 'real', and that there is a solution to the 'problem'. There may be many different ways of looking at the problem and there may be many

possible solutions. Conversely, there may be no solution to the problem and the problem itself, with any possible solutions, will change with time.

Through the lens of the postmodernist, action researchers may come to the realisation that their actions could have multi-meanings. Every action can imply its contradiction. To affirm something by action is to set in motion a chain of significance that simultaneously confirms its negation (Jennings and Graham, 1996: 61).

This quote brings to mind one of the principles of action research defined by Winter (1996: 13): that of a dialectical critique. Hegel's notion of dialectics was that each point of view (thesis) and its counter argument (antithesis) could both contain elements of truth. The dialectical method comprises bringing the truth from each side together in a new formulation called synthesis⁶⁰. The research described in chapter three confirmed a perception that boys are sexist and women teachers in schools experience particular forms of harassment. However, my experience in WBS, based on the recognition that boys also have the ability to empathise, work collaboratively, and sensitively explore issues when structures are in place to allow this to happen (see page 53), also confirmed a belief that a focus on sexism was not useful and that boys' learning needs must be the focus for work in boys' schools. This recognition and dilemma is what led to the search for a research methodology that would entail recognition that there is no one 'truth' about boys, and that all 'solutions' are partial and have a questionable logic and value. Poststructuralism offers such a methodology, and policy archaeology and discourse analysis are useful methods for doing so.

As described above, the action research described in chapter three was for the purpose of producing 'solutions' or policies. Drawing on the work of Fay (1975), Ball (1995) offers five different conceptions of the relationship between research, policy and practice:

- i. policy scholarship – intellectual analysis informing thinking about policy but no clear prescriptions
- ii. policy science or policy engineering – establishing procedures for determining the technically best course of action to adopt in implementing a decision or goal
- iii. interpretative social science – revealing to social actors what they and others are doing to remove 'errors' in perception
- iv. critical social science – going beyond describing how social interaction takes place to itself providing a catalyst for social change within complex contexts
- v. policy entrepreneurship – a form of activity offering little or no scholarship and a commitment to 'the application of certain technical solutions to organisations and contexts which are taken *a priori* to be in need of structural and/ or cultural change' (*Ibid*: 265).

Clearly, the feminist critical action research described in this thesis, is an example of (iv) above. Ball (1995) describes this as a 'an attractive and popular position' but one which is insufficient to address the limitations of policy science, or the challenges posed by postmodernist and poststructuralist assaults on the academy (Ball, 1995: 263). In Ball's analysis, position (iv) is clearly preferable to position (v). Policy entrepreneurship describes the relationship between research, policy and practice underpinning the 'solutions' to boys' 'underachievement' described in chapter five. Ball's preferred position is none of the above, but a 'poststructural, post epistemological' alternative in which: 'Theory is a vehicle for "thinking otherwise" that offers a language for challenge and modes of thought not articulated by dominant others' (Ball, 1995: 266):

The purpose of such theory is to de-familiarize present practices and categories, to make them seem less self-evident and necessary, and to open up spaces for invention of new forms of experience... The process of dissidentification of intellectuals and their relationship to the 'business of truth'. The post-epistemological theorist will eschew the scientific claim to originality, discovery and the improvement of the human condition (and will be)... a cultural critic offering perspective rather than truth...edifying conversations, rather than truth-generating epistemological efforts must be the staple of a poststructural social science (Ball, 1995: 268).

Critical theorists (including feminists) have criticised poststructuralist analysis because they argue it undermines analysis of the working of oppression and subverts work toward social justice (Lather, 1991; Nielsen, 1990). Some feminists have asserted that (male) researchers switched to a postmodern philosophy just at the point where the hegemony of their views was being challenged by feminists (Fox- Genovese, 1986; Harding, 1991; Brodribb, 1992). Jennings and Graham (1996: 170) point out that Habermas views poststructuralism as 'neo-conservative' because, unlike critical theory, it offers us 'no 'theoretical' reason to move in one social direction or another'. They go on to argue, however, that it is possible to reconcile poststructuralism and critical theory: in the reflective stage of the action cycle it is feasible to analyse and expose discourses. It has been shown in this thesis that critical theory and poststructuralism are based in radically different views of power, truth, the role of knowledge, the purpose of research, and so on, and they lead to different policy perspectives. Because of this it is difficult to see how a synthesis can be reached.

Webb (1996) suggests that while critical action research can be stimulating for those involved and effect good educational developments, postmodernism (and poststructuralism) challenges us to move out of our 'comfort zones' (whether action research, reflective practice,

60 From a poststructuralist perspective the dialectical method is problematic because of the linguistic limits on synthesis.

phenomenology and so on), and recognise that our version of what is 'good' is part of the construction of difference. Claims to understanding of the 'objective truth' of oppression, exploitation and suffering, and 'solutions' suggested by critical theorists need to be treated with scepticism. This does not mean indifference or failure to act:

We should not lose our values or abdicate responsibility, but these will become less anchored, more contingent. This does not excuse us from action: postmodernism will not imprison us and prevent us from acting. Indeed it could help us to see for the first time the imprisoning characteristics of our most cherished standpoints... They (educational developers) will assume a critical orientation to narratives claiming foundational status, such as critical theory or phenomenography. In mounting such critiques they inevitably look for the reduced form of 'solidarity' which postmodernism suggests: always in construction, subject to re-negotiation, contingent and transitory (*Ibid*: 157).

It is suggested here, that far from being conservative, poststructuralism is the most critical of all critical theory because rather than being caught up in clashes about causes and extents (as was much early feminist theory), it challenges the nature of the formulation of problems. Through doing so it challenges cherished beliefs about society and the progress of civilization; it challenges the possibilities of solving problems through social regulation, and it challenges sociology itself. It leads to troubling and provocative thoughts.

10.2 Research and truth

One of the main concerns in this thesis has been how to develop Foucault's philosophy into a research method for analysing 'problems' in education: policy archaeology (Scheurich, 1997). Policy archaeology has been invaluable for the analysis of discourse about boys' and their education, and in turn a focus on boys has illustrated the method. Policy archaeology highlights that social problems are socially constructed. Furthermore, poststructuralism would acknowledge that the researcher is also socially constructed: that the position taken in this thesis is partial, tentative, temporary and subject to the same subversive strategies as recommended as appropriate for exploration of the social world.

The intellectual climate within which the 'problem' of boys is addressed is very different in the 2000s than it was in the 1980s; within sociology there has been a move away from positivism to postmodernism, and this is reflected in the theoretical stance taken in this thesis. I am claiming to make a contributing to discussion and to offer an interesting look at discourses about boys and boys' schools, rather than to create new 'knowledge'. Postmodernism is particularly concerned to challenge claims of 'truth' and 'knowledge' production. I stated in my methodology section (chapter two) that I would not make claims to have discovered new 'truths' or 'knowledge'. Such claims would contradict a poststructuralist perspective, which sees knowledge construction as fundamental to the way power operates in society (page 27).

Usher and Edwards (1994: 148-149) point out that 'epistemology is never "innocent" because it always contains within itself a set of values – which means there is always a politics of research, an implication of research with power relations'. This thesis has asked questions about whose interests are served by identifying boys as a problem. It has also asked whose interests are served, what are the power relations out of which boy-centred research, and masculinist study described in chapter seven has arisen. What is the knowledge-power relationship at its base? Furthermore, and crucially in relation to genealogy, I am also caught up in the production of power. This awareness also requires analysis of its implications for my power and responsibilities as researcher and teacher, for example in relation to my role in constructing discourses of boys' sexism in the 1980s, and in constructing the problematisation of seeing boys as a problem in this thesis.

Ontological views are crucial to all research and should be made explicit, but are particularly important for this research because it is fundamentally concerned with challenging the 'truth' about boys. It is argued that this 'truth' is contextual and perceptual. Poststructuralist research does not set out to bring about change, other than change in thinking. I hope I have also initiated a new way of thinking about 'problems', boys, and 'solutions'.

Poststructuralist analysis may be frustrating and irritating to those seeking certainty and positive change. I can almost hear 'so what?' in response to this thesis. My response is that scepticism is healthy, and that all change should start by change to ourselves. I have changed the way I think. I believe policy archaeology could usefully be applied to any social 'problem' in education or the social sciences, and would help us to 'think differently' about it, for example, dyslexia, bullying, 'underachievement' of African-Caribbean boys. I have made a contribution to research methodology in education by taking each stage of policy archaeology, constructing my research aims in relation to each stage, and focusing my writing in each chapter on that aim and stage. This method is easily replicable.

The original case study of boys and their education in WBS was based in feminist realism – we thought what we saw was the truth. We thought we were data collecting. In fact we were engaged in a process of data construction from a feminist perspective. I have made an ontological shift from feminist realism (discovering the processes involved in boys' sexism), through feminist constructivism (discovering the operation of sexism in boys' schools and its effects) to postmodern nominalism (analysing how social problems become identified as such). This thesis is based on a rejection of the positivist (realist) view of research – that it is to develop new knowledge based on finding the 'truth' – that what we see is what is there and our job is to develop theories to explain it: 'My theory explains what is there'. This was the ontological position taken in the critical action research outlined in chapter three, for example,

observation of boys in school showed that they sexually harass women teachers and this led to a search for explanations for their behaviour. This thesis also rejects the feminist constructivist position (post-positivist). This is based on the notion that what we believe shapes what we see, and is in turn socially or individually constructed. Our research purpose is to uncover the ideologies hiding the 'real' truth. For example, radical feminism leads me to interpret authoritarian discipline practices or 'transmission' approaches to teaching as 'masculine' and, therefore, 'sexist': 'my theory shapes what I see'.

This thesis challenges both the above beliefs. As outlined in chapter two, I have tried to develop a postmodern perspective on truth, consistent with poststructuralism, that 'There's nothing to see or theorise until I name it'. It follows that ' "truth" is relative to a particular time and place' (Scheurich, 1997: 33). For example, if the discourse of sexual harassment is prevalent, because of particular events and conditions, then I will see and experience sexual harassment. Analysis of women teachers' discourses in the 2000s showed that they seemed not to experience sexual harassment: they appeared not to think it possible for this to happen – they are adults, boys are children (chapter six).

From a postmodern ontological position:

- 'data' is historically and culturally specific
- all research 'data' is constructed by the researcher
- the positivist uncovering of 'truth' is rejected (thus problems of validity of this 'truth' are superfluous)
- dualism is rejected (for example, boys are like this, girls are like that)
- discourse creates reality

10.3 Reflections on learning

On page 32 I suggested congruence between poststructuralism and postmodernism. However, I now wonder whether there are some tensions between these concepts. For example, one difficulty with this analysis, and one I have not been able to satisfactorily resolve, is that postmodernism critiques the way that discourse produces dualist concepts. Yet, poststructuralist analysis views people as determined through discourse. This seems to me to be a contradiction, since the 'death of the subject' (page 23) seems to me to emphasise the dualist subject-object split of much social science over the last century as highlighted on page 149.

If the subject is 'dead', the related problem for poststructuralism is how, if all thought is determined by discourse, can something new be created, or brought into being. For example, if the object 'piano' does not exist, and I do not have the word to conjure up the image of a 'piano', how can I think about inventing such an object? It seems that from a poststructuralist perspective I could only develop the concept of 'piano' in particular circumstances, at a specific historical time, and when a unique combinations of circumstances arose. This raises questions

about individual creativity and artistry, which rather than being the property of a genius individual operating outside of societal norms, may be one expression of the collective social order. A possible contradiction arises, therefore, in relation to Foucault's assertion (see page 16) that poststructuralist analysis allows us to consider how far it is possible to think differently. This seems to imply agency. Perhaps a response to this might be to suppose that this difference in my thinking is part of a contemporaneous 'community' way of seeing and understanding differently, not mine alone. Building on the ideas of Scheurich (1997: 163-169) I could perhaps best explain this with reference to the eco-system. We can understand this system as an extremely complex and interdependent set of events; each event has an impact on the whole system. Anything that happens within the system has a 'knock-on' and 'knock-back' effect on the whole system. We readily accept that all other animals are part of this system, yet we imagine that human activity is somehow *outside* of the system: we have an impact on it through our actions, but we do not perceive ourselves as just *one* more aspect of the whole, and as having the same relevance and importance as any other aspect. If we *were* to imagine this, then we would see our thinking was part of the system, and an outcome of it, rather than independent of it:

In the archaeological view, individuality is not outside the array; it is but one more category or node within the array. It is just one more enactment of the array, as is any other category ... a decentred self or decentred subjectivity could be seen as much more contextual, influenced by or immersed within its context. A mind or consciousness could be seen not as an atomistic singularity but as interwoven within a broader social or cultural or contextual field that includes others... we would not think so much of an individual person thinking alone but of a context or a field thinking or, more broadly, of a culture or archaeology thinking... I would not think I was the sole author of my thoughts (including these here), nor would I think of myself as a singular, separate 'I' (*Ibid*: 164-5).

A second problem for poststructuralism relates to how multiple discourses might exist at the same time, and to how some discourses become more powerful than others. On page 188 I drew on Foucault's concept of disciplinary power as one explanation for why the discourse of male 'underachievement' has gained dominance. However, this explanation of how discourses gain dominance does not satisfy the question of how multiple discourses are possible within the archaeology in the first place. I think the analogy of the world eco system is useful once more. We can readily comprehend that an event in one part of the system will have the greatest impact on other parts of the system in closest proximity to the event. We can also understand that it is possible for the occurrence of simultaneous and seemingly unconnected events in another part of the system with their own greater or smaller impacts. However, we might also be able to form a hypothesis about a connection between the two events, for example, global warming. I suggest we view a discourse in the same way as an event in the eco system; this necessitates, again, removing the 'I' from the equation.

A final problem that I have not been able to resolve is that if objects do not pre-exist discourses, then the discourses that I am identifying in this thesis do not pre-exist my own discourse. Further, to be consistent, I would need to employ archaeology to uncover the conditions that make it possible for me to use the archaeological methods and discourse analysis of discourse. These are clearly some of the problems that make many researchers sceptical of post-structuralism (see Jones and Porter, 1994).

I am aware I have left loose ends and confusing contradictions (Scheurich, 1997: 114). For example, poststructuralism generally resists categorising, yet I have been careful to catalogue the similarities and differences between diverse research methodologies. Poststructuralism is suspicious of 'transcendental arguments' and 'metanarratives' (Peters, 1999: para 6.12) and while I have found policy archaeology very useful, I do not mean to suggest that the research methodologies discussed earlier in this thesis, including critical theory, action research and social constructivism, are *less* useful, or 'mistaken' ways of understanding the world.

Another major difficulty in writing this thesis has been the struggle encountered in trying to move beyond positivist/modernist tendencies. I am steeped in these traditions and 'thinking differently' has required that I step outside my proclivity to evaluate, analyse, argue, find 'evidence' or 'interpret'. On reflection, I think this is particularly manifest in chapter six where I have made a number of interpretations relating to women teachers' talk about boys. For example, on page 128 I interpret the word 'active' to denote motion, busyness, quickness, exerting influence, and take boys' 'activity' to imply girls' 'passivity'; in turn interpreted by me as denoting submission, inertia, being 'acted on'. I was attempting here to clarify and make the discourse explicit. However, poststructuralist analysis is not concerned with interpreting discourse, but simply with uncovering it. Additionally, I do not feel entirely satisfied by my decision to interview women teachers for this thesis.⁶¹ I am aware that issues of power asymmetry and meaning construction remain. I wonder whether interview can be utilised as a method in poststructural analysis at all, and am aware of dualist tensions between my research rationale and research method relating to the decision to interview *women* (rather than teachers) about *boys*. A further problem relates to the comparison of discourses collected through interviews in the 2000s, and largely through questionnaire in the 1980s. It is possible that these different forms of communication affected the ways that these women teachers thought and talked about boys.

61 See, for example, Scheurich (1997) Chapter 3: A Postmodernist Critique of Research Interviewing.

I struggled with my desire to analyse the *content* of ‘speech acts’, to count the number of women in chapter six who said that boys are ‘immature’ – thus adding further evidence to ‘data’ collected in the 1980s that indicated this is ‘true’, or how many women said that boys use homophobic language, so this is *really* happening. I had to remind myself that I was not looking for evidence about what boys are like or how they behave, but analysing how boys are talked about and understood within a specific social context. This pinpoints the difficulty of standing back from ‘data’ as a search for evidence of what is or is not happening, what boys are like or not like, and instead to analyse discourse. I am aware that there are some inconsistencies in relation to this attempt, however I have found the endeavour to apply policy archaeology to educational ‘problems’ extremely exciting, and very useful in relation to clarifying the beliefs underpinning approaches to boys’ learning, masculinist study and most of all, different research methodologies.

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Appendix 1: Books published in the 1980s and more recently with a focus on boys and education

Work specifically focussing on boys work, masculinities and schooling published in the UK in the 1980s

- 1984 - Askew, S. and Ross, C. *Anti-sexist work with Boys*. The Inner London Education Authority.
1984 - Arnot, M. How Shall We Educate Our Sons? In R. Deem, *Co-education Reconsidered*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
1985 - Lloyd, T. *Working with Boys*. National Youth Bureau.
1988 - Askew, S. and Ross, C. *Boys Don't Cry: Boys And Sexism In Education*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Work focusing on boys' work, masculinities and schooling published in the UK in the 1990s and 2000

- 1994 - Mac An Ghaill, M. *The Making Of Men: Masculinities, Sexualities And Schooling*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
1996 - Salisbury, J. and Jackson, D. *Challenging Macho Values: Practical Ways of Working With Adolescent Boys*. London: Falmer Press.
1997 - Arnold, R. *Raising Levels Of Achievement In Boys*. EMIE.
1997 - Sewell, T. *Black Masculinities And Schooling*. Stoke On Trent: Trentham Books
1997 - *Masculinities In Education, Special Issue of Gender and Education*, 9(1), 105-14
1998 - Gilbert, R and Gilbert, P. *Masculinity Goes to School*. London: Routledge
1998 - Fletcher, R. and Browne, R. *Boys In Schools*. Stroud: Hawthorn Press.
1998 - Epstein, D., Elwood, J., Hey, V and Maw, J. (eds) *Failing Boys? Issues in Gender and Achievement*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
1998 - *Can Do Better: Boys And English*. London: QCA
1999 - Head, J. *Understanding The Boys: Issues of Behaviour and Achievement*. London: Falmer Press.
2000 - Bleach, K. (ed) *Raising Boys Achievement in Schools*. Stoke On Trent: Trentham Books
2000 - Lesco, N. (ed) *Masculinities at School*. London: Sage.
2001 - Martino, W. and Meyenn, B. *What About The Boys: Issues of Masculinity in Schools*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
2001 - Mills, M. *Challenging Violence In Schools: An Issue of Masculinities*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
2003 - Martino, W. and Pallotta-Chiarolli, M. *So What's a Boy? Addressing Issues of Masculinity and Schooling*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Work specifically focusing on the construction of masculinities published in the UK in 1970s and early 1980s

- 1970 - Tolson, A. *The Limits of Masculinity*, London: Tavistock.
1980 - Seidler, V. *Raging Bull*, in Achilles Heel, No. 5.
1984 - Hodson, P. *Men: An Investigation into the Emotional Male*, Ariel Books.
1985 - Morrison, P. and Eardley, T. *About Men*. Channel 4 film.
1987 - H. Brod (ed.) *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies*. London: Allen and Unwin.

Work specifically focusing on the construction of masculinities published in the UK in the 1990s and 2000

- 1990 - Segal, L. *Slow Motion, Changing Masculinities*, Changing Men. London: Virago.
- 1990 - Formaini, H. *Men: The Darker Continent*. London: Mandarin.
- 1991 - Bly, R. *Iron John: A Book About Men*. London: Element.
- 1992 - Miedzian, M. *Boys Will Be Boys: Breaking The Link Between Masculinity And Violence*. London: Virago.
- 1992 - Elium, D. and Elium, J. *Raising a Son: Parenting and the Making of a Healthy Man*. Stroud: Hawthorn Press.
- 1993 - Greenstein, B. *The Fragile Male*. London: Boxtree.
- 1994 - Brod, H. and Kaufman, M. *Theorizing Masculinities*. London: Sage.
- 1994 - Seidler, V. J. *Unreasonable Men: Masculinity And Social Theory*, London: Routledge.
- 1994 - Horrocks, R. *Masculinity in Crisis: Myths, Fantasies and Realities*. London: Macmillan.
- 1995 - Connell, R. W. *Masculinities*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- 1995 - Edley, N. and Wetherell, M. *Men in Perspective: Practice, Power and Identity*. London: Prentice Hall.
- 1996 - Mac an Ghaill, M (ed) *Understanding Masculinities*, Buckingham: Open University Press.
- 1996 - Chandler, T. (eds) *Making Men: Rugby and Masculine Identity*. London: Frank Cass.
- 1996 - Mosse, G. L. *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 1997 - Seidler, V. J. *Man Enough: Embodying Masculinities*, London: Sage.
- 1998 - MacInnes, J. *The End of Masculinity*, Buckingham: Open University Press.
- 1998 - Petersen, A. *Unmasking the Masculine: Men and Identity in a Sceptical Age*. London: Sage.
- 2000 - O'Donnell, M. Sharpe, S. *Uncertain Masculinities: Youth, Ethnicity and Class in Contemporary Britain*. London: Routledge.
- 2002 - Frosh, S., Phoenix, A. and Pattman, R. *Young Masculinities*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- 2002 - Adams, R. and Savran, D. (eds) *The Masculinity Studies Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- 2003 - Martino, W. and Pallotta-Chiarolli, M. *So What's a Boy?* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Appendix 2: Males and females: statistical information relating to work, education and health

This Appendix contains statistical information about boys and girls/men and women relating to:

- the labour market
- education
- social and health issues.

All references are found in the reference section on page 200.

Men and women in the labour market

As indicated in the introduction, Department of Trade and Industry statistics show that the average weekly income for all women (including part-time workers) was just over half that of men in 2002 - £145 as opposed to £287 (Smith, 2003). Despite the Sex Discrimination and Equal Pay Acts, Hutton reported that in 1998 women's earnings had slipped for the first time in 10 years (Hutton, 1998).

However both men and women's employment patterns have changed. The total number of 15-59 year old women in the UK labour market who are economically active in England and Wales has *increased* from 38% in 1931 to 68% in 1999 and more women work part-time, flexi time and job share (Bimrose, 2001). Since the 1970s there has been a 16.8% drop in the number of men in employment (HMSO, 1992, 1994). In 1997 the overall unemployment rates for males were 8.1% for men and 5.8% for women (Office for National Statistics, 1998).

Table 2: UK employees in employment, seasonally adjusted, in thousands (Taken from McInnes, 1998: 50)

	All males and females	Males			Females		
		All	Full time	Part time	All	Full time	Part time
June 1971	22,131	13,735	13,133	602	8,396	5,603	2,793
Proportion of all employees (per cent)	100.0	62.1	59.3	2.7	37.9	25.3	12.6
June 1996	22,205	11,227	9,908	1,319	10,978	5,950	5,028
Proportion of all employees (per cent)	100.0	50.6	44.6	5.9	49.4	26.8	22.6
Absolute change 1971-96 (per cent)	74	-2,508	-3,225	717	2,582	347	2,235
Relative change 1971-96 (per cent)	0.3	-18.3	-24.6	119.1	30.8	6.2	80.0

Table 2 shows that there is almost exactly the same number of jobs in 1996 as there were in 1971. While women's full time employment has risen by one third of a million during this time, men have lost over three million full time jobs and there are now three million more part-time jobs than in 1971.

The number of households where two adults are employed has increased from 43% of both adults working in 1973 to 60% of both adults working in 1992. Since the level of employment has not changed this has resulted in a high level of unemployment in single parent households and neither adult working in 10% of households with two adults (Condy, 1994).

While a great deal of statistical information relating to gender, qualifications and employment is available, the relationship between gender and other important variables, particularly class and ethnicity is unclear. Most published data takes only one variable into account. The EOC confirm 'One of the most important omissions is the lack of good quality, accurate data on the qualifications, performance and employment experience of young people disaggregated at the very least, by gender and preferably also by ethnicity and social class' (EOC 1998). Ethnicity and class intersect with gender to reduce or compound disadvantage. For example:

- white women earn more than women from minority ethnic groups in London, but outside London women from Chinese and 'Other' ethnic groups have highest earnings. Men display similar earning patterns (DFEE 2000a)
- 85% of white men aged 16-64 are economically active compared to 77% for all minority groups, while 74% of white women of the same age are economically active compared with 56% of minority ethnic women (DfEE, 2000a).
- 21% of African-Caribbean men and 18% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi men are unemployed. Unemployment rates are high for men from social class IV and V, men from areas where industrial and manufacturing industries were the most common employers, such as the docks in North East and Merseyside, mining in Yorkshire and South Wales, and the car industries of the Midlands (DFEE, 1997c). However, Indian and Chinese people tend to experience relatively low unemployment rates (DFEE, 2000a). Similar complex patterns are found in education.

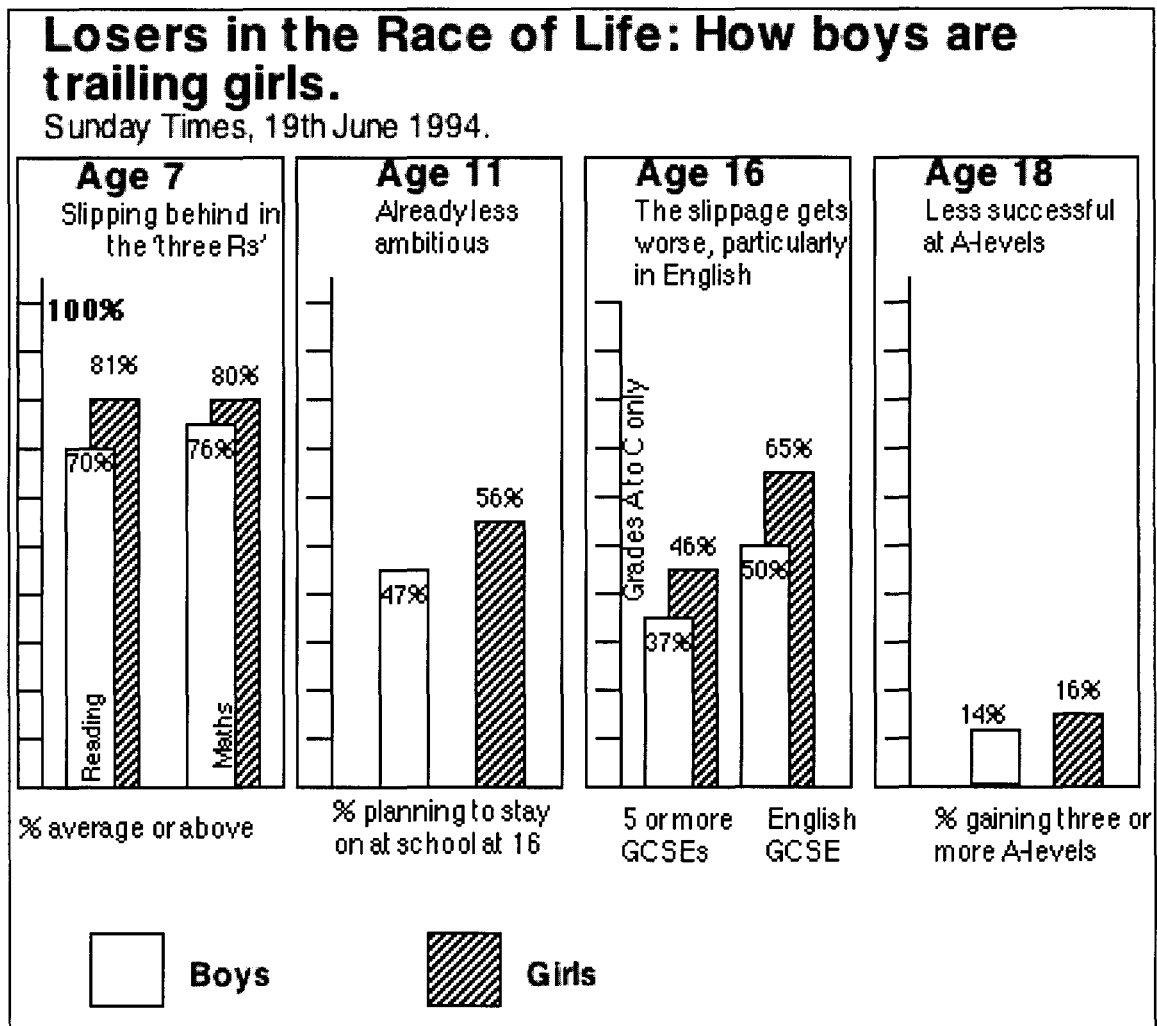
Boys and Girls in education

A central focus for this thesis is the growing concern about the education of boys in many countries since the mid - 1990s. It has been argued that girls no longer suffered any educational disadvantage, and that discrimination against girls and women had now largely been removed. Some writers saw initiatives for girls as discriminating against boys and suggested that resources which were directed at improving girls' achievement should now be re-directed at improving boys' achievement. Barber (1995) wrote:

It is a pitiful performance by boys that now requires a radical rethinking of attitudes to equal opportunities. The question is: *have girls had it too good for too long while society has complacently accepted that boys will be boys?* (Barber 1995:7, my emphasis).

In the mid-90's when concerns about boys first came onto the agenda, the media highlighted statistics such as those in Table 3, showing boys and girls' comparative achievements and attitudes to schooling.

Table 3: Losers in the Race of Life.



This account appears to tell a straightforward picture of 'failing boys'. However, the reality is much more complex as shown below.

Achievement at GCSE

At the end of the 1980s GCSE's were introduced into schools in England and Wales, establishing a common award scheme for all young people, where previously there had been a range of possible qualifications, including CSEs and GCEs. Before the introduction of the GCSE, girls outperformed boys, but the gap was smaller : 4% in 1975 (Arnot *et al*, 1999:15). In 1994 the government responded to suggestions that the increased gap may be because of examination through course work by reducing the weighting given to course work. This

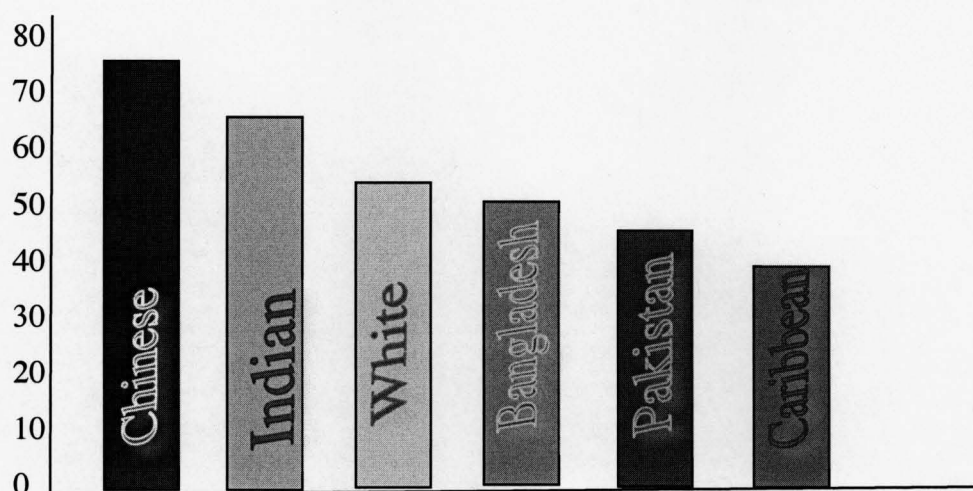
intervention did nothing to close the gap (DfEE, 1997). Since then, while the performance of both young men and women has improved, young women have consistently performed better than young men in the majority of subjects. For example, in 1990/91 44.0% of girls and 36.0% of boys achieved 5 or more A*- C grades. By 1998/9 this figure had risen to 53.2% of girls compared with 42.6% of boys. Girls performed better than boys in English, mathematics, joint science, design and technology, history and all modern languages. Boys outperformed girls in physics, chemistry, biological sciences, IT, geography (DfEE 1999a). These statistics show that girls continued to perform better than boys soon after GCSEs were introduced, that boys and girls improved their performance over the next eight years, but that girls improved more than boys by 2.6%. Throughout this period girls have done better in humanities and language-based subjects but the figures have diverged: in 1996 40.1% of boys and 57.7% of girls gained an A to C in English GCSE. However in science and mathematics the figures have converged: in 1996 40.9 % of girls gained A to C in mathematics GCSE compared with 39.7% of boys, while 42.7% of girls and 41.4% of boys gained A to C in at least one science subject (DfEE 1997).

These figures suggest that *where girls take the same examinations* as boys, they tend to outperform boys, and that the smaller gap pre-1988 may partly be explained by the fact that girls and boys took different examinations: they were entered for CSEs rather than GCEs, or chose not to study sciences at all⁶².

However, gender intersects with socio-economic class and ethnicity to produce a more complex picture than the one suggested so far. Table 4 below shows GCSE results in England in 2004 by ethnicity.

62 Prior to the introduction of the common core National Curriculum in 1988 when study of science became compulsory in years 10 and 11, girls could opt out.

Table 4. 5 A – C GCSEs. England 2004.



Source DfES/SFR (DfES, 2005)

Because no centralised data exist for analysing the intersection of gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic class in relation to school achievement (Gillborn and Gipps, 1996) any analysis is partial or even haphazard. All LEA maintained and grant-maintained schools are required to collect information on ethnic background, but Local Authorities are under no obligation to analyse examination results by ethnicity or socio economic class (Foster, 2000:195). The data below are taken from Berkshire LEA in 1996 (abolished by local government reform in 1998) and show similar trends to those discussed by Gillborn and Gipps (1996).

Table 5: Average examination points scored: Year 11 GCSE candidates by ethnic group and gender 1995. Berkshire County Council (1996)

	Boys	Girls
White	38.3	42.2
Black African	31.0	36.4
Black Caribbean	24.2	30.0
Black Other	39.2	32.4
African Caribbean	28.3	32.0
Indian	37.5	38.8
Pakistani	27.0	32.4
Bangladeshi	31.6	31.0
Chinese	37.8	52.3
Other	41.9	42.6
Not known	30.6	38.1
All candidates	36.6	40.9

The Women's Unit (2000) suggests social class is the primary factors in achievement: young people from professional backgrounds have the highest levels of attainment at GCSE, while those from manual and unskilled families have the lowest. According to DfEE figures, in 1997 children from the most advantaged backgrounds (classified as 'managerial/ professional' in the YCS) were more than three times as likely to attain five or more higher grade GCSEs than their peers at the other end of the class spectrum (in the 'unskilled manual' group) (DfEE, 1999e: 9). There is evidence that the inequality of attainment between social classes has grown since the late 1980s. For example, in relation to the five higher grade benchmark, between 1988 and 1997, the gap between children from 'managerial/professional' backgrounds and 'unskilled manual' groups grew from 40 to 49 percentage points (*Ibid*)⁶³.

Information relating to social exclusion, pathways after 16, higher education and health also tells a more complex story than the simple discourse of boys' 'underachievement'.

Social exclusion

Gender differences have received a lot of attention in relation to truancy and exclusion in the under 16-age group. Reported rates of *truancy* for young men and young women are similar (Casey and Smith 1995). For both males and females truancy has been reported as being strongly related to involvement in offending (Graham and Bowling 1995). A front page Evening Standard caption reads 'Street Crime? Blame Truants'. The article reported on a project funded by the European Social Fund to investigate links between criminality and educational underachievement of boys, which claimed that:

Schoolboy truants are responsible for a disturbing wave of street crime in London, according to Scotland Yard. Sir Paul Condon has warned the Government that children aged between 10 and 16 are responsible for 40 percent of all street robberies and a third of car thefts and burglaries in the capital (Evening Standard, 1998:1).

Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that 82% of those who are *excluded* from school are male. Support services for preventing exclusion and for students who have been excluded have been dominated by boys and have tended to ignore the 18% of girls who are excluded (National Children's Bureau 2001). Exclusion rates are highest amongst Black Caribbean, Black African and black 'other' young men (DfEE 1999b) and this perpetuates a cycle in which young black men have come to be perceived as 'a problem'.

Pathways after 16

The Careers Service Activity Survey 'Moving On' (DFEE, 2000b) reveals that young women are more likely to be in full-time education after year 11 (75.7% female, 65.8% male). For

⁶³ In 1988, five or more higher grade GCSEs were attained by 52 per cent of children from 'managerial/professional' backgrounds and 12 per cent of peers from 'unskilled manual' homes; in 1997, the proportions were 69 per cent and 20 per cent respectively (DfEE 1999b: 9).

young people with very good GCSE results the gender gap relating to staying on in education is very small (Payne 1998). Conversely, young men are more likely to be in the labour market, either training or employment (20.9% male, 13.1% female). Young men are slightly more likely to be 'not settled' in full-time activity (7.9% male, 6.6% female) (DfEE 2000b).

Post-16 education and training offers a wide range of options, including 'A' levels, vocational qualifications and modern apprenticeships. Strong gender differences are to be seen in choice of subject in both 'academic' and vocational courses.

'A' levels

Research indicates that what students have studied at GCSE and how well they performed dominates their decisions about what to study at 'A' Level (Payne 1998). There is some evidence that pupils in single sex and mixed schools make different choices as to what subjects to study at 'A' Level. Girls in single-sex schools are more likely than girls in mixed schools to study maths or physical sciences (but less likely than boys). The Youth Cohort Study estimates show that, among 16 year-olds taking at least two 'A' levels, approximately 50% of girls are not taking any science subject (including maths) whereas the equivalent figure for boys is 30% (Payne 1995). After the age of 16 pupils appear to revert to traditional choices, with girls choosing arts/humanities and boys choosing science/ technology subjects. At 'A' level:

- 74% of English students are female (EOC, 2001a)
- 72% of Computing students are male (EOC, 2001a)
- 77% of Physics students are male (Wise, 2001).

Since the mid-1990s the issue of boys' achievement tends to resurface each summer after the publication of GCSE and 'A' level results. For example, the table below indicates that for the first time, the percentage of girls achieving grade A's at 'A' level in every subject except for computing, English and French in 2000 was higher than the percentage of boys. The percentage of girls achieving grade B's in every subject was also higher, except for economics, English, French and history. At the other extreme there was a higher percent of boys gaining D's and E's in every subject except in computing, economics, English and French. (The Mirror, 17.08.2000). *However, statistics such as these fail to highlight that the numbers of girls in mathematics, science, technology and computing at 'A' level are small.*

Table 6: A Level Results 2000

Subject	Gender	A	B	C	D	E
Art & Design	Male	21.2	19.8	23.9	18.3	10.8
	Female	25.5	22.1	24.7	16.3	7.9
	All	23.9	21.3	24.5	17.0	8.9
Biology	Male	16.1	18.2	19.1	18.2	14.9
	Female	18.8	20.6	19.9	16.8	12.5
	All	17.8	19.7	19.6	17.2	13.5
Business	Male	8.6	18.4	24.9	21.9	14.3
Studies	Female	11.0	19.7	24.8	20.5	12.5
	All	9.7	19.0	24.9	21.2	13.5
Chemistry	Male	24.1	21.1	18.3	15.1	10.9
	Female	27.1	23.2	18.7	14.2	9.1
	All	25.6	22.1	18.5	14.6	10.1
Computing	Male	8.8	14.2	20.6	22.7	17.2
	Female	6.7	14.5	22.8	24.3	17.7
	All	8.4	14.3	21.0	23.0	17.4
Economics	Male	22.0	19.1	18.7	17.5	11.8
	Female	22.3	18.9	18.3	16.7	12.1
	All	22.1	19.0	18.6	17.2	11.9
English	Male	16.5	19.5	23.1	20.3	12.6
	Female	15.3	19.4	24.3	21.5	12.9
	All	15.6	19.5	24.0	21.1	12.8
French	Male	25.6	22.2	20.0	14.6	10.2
	Female	22.6	21.2	20.2	17.0	10.7
	All	23.5	21.5	20.1	16.3	10.5
Geography	Male	15.1	21.5	23.5	19.1	12.4
	Female	21.3	24.4	22.5	16.0	9.5
	All	17.9	22.8	23.1	17.7	11.0
History	Male	17.2	20.6	21.8	18.0	11.5
	Female	17.5	20.5	22.2	17.4	11.5
	All	17.3	20.6	22.0	17.7	11.5
Maths	Male	28.3	18.5	16.4	14.2	10.3
	Female	29.9	20.2	17.3	13.8	9.6
	All	28.9	19.2	16.7	14.0	10.1
Physics	Male	20.1	21.4	23.4	16.2	10.6
	Female	28.3	22.4	18.3	13.5	9.7
	All	24.7	20.0	18.6	15.0	11.2
Technology	Male	13.4	15.2	25.4	22.2	14.4
	Female	15.5	17.9	27.2	21.8	11.7
	All	14.0	15.9	25.9	22.1	13.7

Vocational qualifications

The national curriculum dictates that all students have to study a range of subjects at GCSE, which limits the effects of stereotyping. In terms of educational and vocational equality, therefore, there remains a strong argument against 'choice' in pre-16 examination subjects. However, government emphasis on the importance of education in developing a competitive, efficient and flexible labour market in the last two decades led to reorganisation of the education and training system including emphasising vocational pathways pre and post-16, prioritising skills for lifelong learning, career re-orientation and adaptation to the technological and work practice needs of a post-industrial, postmodern society. The government is also committed to increasing the number of specialist schools and the range of specialisms. The Government White Paper 'Schools; Achieving Success' (DfES, 2001) included proposals to introduce vocational GCSEs, including the option of pursuing predominantly vocational programmes that provide a basis for progression to a Modern Apprenticeship at age 16 or to further vocational study after 16.

The first new GCSEs in vocational subjects were available from September 2002 in some schools. These new GCSEs were initially available in applied art and design; applied business; engineering; health and social care; applied ICT; leisure and tourism, manufacturing; and applied science. Each is a double award, equivalent to two GCSEs. In January 2001 the then Secretary of State announced proposals for 14–16 year olds to study at a college or with a training provider for one or two days a week throughout Key Stage 4 and to work towards qualifications (DfES, 2002).

These proposals could limit rather than extend girls and boys' education and career opportunities because subject choices in vocational subjects are more stereotyped than in traditional 'academic' subjects. The new pre-16 differentiated education qualifications are likely to lead to even further gendered segregation in the market place:

The particular role of vocational education and training is to prepare young people for their post-school employment. The issue of gender stereotyping is therefore linked directly with the current provision and delivery of vocational education and training to young people (Miller and Budd, 1999).

The proportions of young men and women who go on to study for GNVQs and Modern Apprenticeships *post-16* are similar. However:

- 90% of GNVQ health and social care students are female (EOC, 2001a)
- 81% taking GNVQ IT are male (EOC, 2001a).

A similar situation is found with regard to Modern Apprenticeships:

- 3% of engineering and manufacturing modern apprenticeship trainees are female
- 1% of construction trainees are female
- 1% of engineering trainees are female

- 11% of health and social care trainees are male
 - 3% childcare trainees are male
 - 8% hairdressing trainees are male
- (Source: DfEE 1999c).

Again, gender intersects with socio-economic class and ethnicity. The Learning Skills Council (LSC) Inaugural Conference on Equal Opportunities, January 2001 warned that:

Young people from minority ethnic groups are less likely to obtain qualifications and jobs after they complete their training and are seriously under-represented amongst Modern Apprentices, particularly in traditional craft sectors (LSC, 2001).

The Early Leavers study showed that young women are more likely to leave youth training schemes early 'female trainees aged 17 and those with non employed status had the greatest propensity to leave the scheme early' (DfEE, 1999d). The same study also reported that young black African and Caribbean students were more likely to leave than young white/Indian/Pakistani or Sri Lankan students. Research conducted by the Policy Studies Institute (DfES, 2001) also found that in both Advanced Modern Apprenticeship (AMA) schemes and Government Supported Training (GST) schemes young women were more likely to leave than young men.

Higher Education

Women represent over half of all new students admitted to first degree courses; however they tend to study subjects such as social studies, humanities, languages and business studies (EOC 2002). Technical disciplines continue to attract many more men than women. Biology is a notable exception and more than half of all admissions to first-degree courses in this subject are female. Women constitute around one-third of admissions to chemistry, and about one-fifth of admissions to physics, engineering and technology, including computing (EOC, 2002).

For the first time in 2000 young women gained more 1st class degrees in Britain's 170 Universities; 11,000 women gained a 1st compared with 10,800 men and women generally did better in 12 of the main 17 subjects including medicine, law and business (Pirie. 2001).

Statistics also show that in the early 2000s less than 20% of young people under 21 from the lower socio-economic groups go to University compared with over 70% from the highest (DfES, 2002). In 1997/98 ethnic groups comprise nearly 13% of students at first degree-level in UK universities – considerably higher than the minority ethnic share of the population of young people. However, they tend to be concentrated in post-92 Universities and are more likely to be mature students (DfEE 2000a).

Not in education, employment or training (NEET)

The social Exclusion Unit's Report (DfEE 2000c), 'Bridging the Gap', explored the problems faced by young people between the ages of 16-18 who are NEET. They found that females spent more time NEET in total than males and were more likely than males to be economically inactive rather than unemployed. However, males were slightly more likely than females to have more than one NEET spell. The Report 'Young People and Gender' states:

Though official figures for unemployment suggest that this affects more young men, a large group of young women who are outside education and training, remain hidden. Many of these are young women with caring responsibilities...The negative impact on long-term educational and employment involvement of being a young mother has been identified (The Women's Unit, 2000).

Social and health issues

While the media focus on boys since the mid-1990s has highlighted the perception that boys 'underachieve', there are a number of other issues relating to young people that tend not be given as much media attention. An account of some of these occurrences is given below.

Learning and Behavioural Difficulties

Apart from alarm over boys' achievement in examinations in formal education, there has been some concern expressed throughout the English-speaking world about boys' learning difficulties and behaviour (Barber, 1995; O'Doherty 1994). The Sunday Times (Sunday Times, 19.6.94) reported that boys 'now' outnumber girls by two to one in Britain's schools for children with learning difficulties. In special units for pupils with behavioural or discipline problems, there are as many as six boys for every girl. In Australia the O'Doherty (1994) committee reported:

- boys are more likely to suffer from identified learning disabilities such as Attention Deficit Disorder (in a ratio of 4:1), Mixed Dextral (opposing hand-eye condition) and colour blindness
- boys are over-represented in programmes for students with learning problems, particularly problems with literacy. Of the 317 children identified with serious language disorders in the Department of School Education, 256 are boys (O'Doherty committee, 1994)
- boys rather than girls are identified as having behaviour problems. For example, a typical primary school reported that 90 percent of their detentions are boys. Of the 73 students in special units for behaviour disturbed students in NSW, 62 are boys (DSE, 1993).

In America:

- boys are far more likely to be told they have learning disabilities, to be sent to the principal's office, to be suspended from high school (Rosenfield, 1998)

Again, this has been reported as if it is a new problem. In fact, since special units were introduced in the UK, boys from particular social groups have far outnumbered girls in both

units for learning difficulties and in EBD units in schools. For example, the Fish Report (1985) on special needs showed that of all pupils in schools for emotionally disturbed behaviour 86.6 per cent were boys; in 1985 75% of children referred to the LEA diagnostic centre for learning difficulties were boys⁶⁴. It is also noteworthy that the numbers of boys with special education needs has received a very small amount of attention in the media, and by policy makers, compared to the attention paid to boys' 'underachievement'.

Aggression, violence and crime

Crime figures show that to a large extent crime is an activity of young men (Head, 1999: 6), and there is, according to Barber (1995) a growing awareness of violence and intimidation coming mainly from boys. The number of women who are *prosecuted* has increased. For example in 1982 11% of those found guilty in a court in England and Wales were women. In 1997, this figure had risen to 17%. (Home Office, 1999:156). However, 'their offences are frequently 'trivial' in that their thefts are small, their violence aimed at only one person, their behaviour self-damaging' (Delamont, 2001:68). This is born out by the fact that in 1996 only 4% of the prison population were women (Home Office, 1997).

Figure 8: A snapshot of statistics relating to male crime and violence

- The Home Office Crime Survey (Jan, 2005) reported that 1 in 4 men between 16-60 admitted having committed at least 6 criminal offences.
- One in three men born in 1953 were convicted of a serious offence by the age of thirty and most of their first convictions occurred at age 17 (*The Sunday Times*, 19 June, 1994).
- 67% of all victims of violent crime are men – 43% of these crimes occur as a result of pub or street brawls (*The Sunday Times*, 19 June 1994). Gilbert and Gilbert (1998: 16) point out that different groups of men are more vulnerable to homicide and violence, particularly the undereducated and unemployed.
- Sexual offences by men are significantly increasing. Between 1980 and 1990 rape increased from 1,225 to 3,391 convictions, indecent assault on females from 11,498 to 15,783 and indecent assault on males from 2,288 to 3,430. (Home Office, 1990, 1994 and 1997, Criminal Statistics: England and Wales.)
- In the UK the police receive 570,000 domestic violence calls a year. It is estimated that someone is raped, beaten or knifed at home every 6 seconds, and 81% of calls are from women attacked by a man, 8% males attacked by females, 7% males attacked by males and 4% females attacked by females (Pearse, 2000: 21).

Health, Depression and Suicide

Overall in the UK suicide rates have dropped, but between 1971 and 1992 they more than doubled for males aged 16-24 and increased by two thirds for males aged between 25-44 (Head, 1999: 6). Men from social class IV and V are more likely to commit suicide, as are unemployed

⁶⁴ Private communication at the time from the head of the ILEA diagnostic centre for learning difficulties.

men (2-3 times more likely), single, divorced and widowed men (3 times more likely), men with AIDS, men in prison, and abusers of alcohol and drugs (Pritchard, 1992). It has been reported that in adolescence boys kill themselves five times more often than girls (Hales, 2001).

Again, these concerns are found in other English speaking countries:

- Australia has one of the highest rates of youth suicide in the world. Suicide attempts are high for both young males and young females but Bureau of Statistics figures show that nearly four times as many young males actually die in this way. It was reported that boys contemplating suicide often, but do not talk about it in advance as girls tend to do, and so boys do not obtain support which might dissuade them from suicide (O'Dogherty, 1994).

However, in Australia, as in other English speaking countries, there is actually little gender difference in the rates of attempted suicide – it has been suggested that young men and women choose different methods for committing suicide, and the methods chosen by young men are more likely to result in death (Commonwealth department of human services and health, 1995).

However, Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) point out that not all young men are equally at risk – In Australia, Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islanders, non-indigenous males from rural and remote areas and young men who are gay are all more at risk.

While it seems that young men are more likely to succeed in killing themselves, Women are 29% more likely to be admitted to hospital for mental illnesses and are more likely to consult general practitioners for anxiety, depression and other 'mental' problems such as feeling 'tired all the time' and 'nerves' (Delamont, 2001: 66). Other health differences between girls and boys include that:

- boys are more likely to be given medication for hyperactivity or attention deficit disorder (Rosenfield, 1998)
- Males account for 77% of all addicts (Home Office, 1994)
- boys are more likely to be diagnosed as schizophrenic or autistic (Hales, 2001).

If we focus on the 'problem of boys' or 'boys' problems' we can identify many different ways in which their behaviour, health and learning cause disquiet. Generally these behavioural and health problems are not linked to achievement, either in the media or in policy documents.

Similarly, if we turned our attention again to young women, we would find much to worry about. For example, eating disorders, depression, sexual abuse, rise in numbers who seek facial, breast or genital mutilation to change their appearance, STDs, teenage pregnancy, and work in the sex industry. The increase in smoking and alcohol consumption among young women is also causing concern (Cabinet Office, 1999). Young people live in an increasingly complex world in which 'relationships of both production and reproduction are affected by escalating commercialism and sexualisation, coupled with the end of jobs for life and a culture of uncertainty, self invention through a discourse of limitless choice' (Walkerdine *et al.* 2001: 2). Indeed Walkerdine *et al* (2001: 3) go so far as to suggest that 'it could be argued that we are witnessing the complete collapse of civil society, hence the attempt further to develop the psychological and social characteristics of the Robinson Crusoe economic man of liberalism'. It

is hardly surprising that social problems should increasingly be expressed in a variety of anti-social or self-destructive ways, or that these should be expressed differently by young men and women⁶⁵. Furthermore, these problems are not directly linked to the education system, but to wider social systems. The links between educational problems and societal problems are rarely made explicit.

The review of research submitted to the Women's Unit (2000) on young people from a gendered perspective concludes:

Of critical concern to policy-makers is the question of whether males or females are more at risk during the adolescent years. At different times in the past decades public anxiety has focused on one or other of the genders, but it needs to be recognised that both young women and men may be vulnerable in different ways. The central conclusion of this review is that it would be wrong to identify either males or females as being more in need of attention from policy makers' (The Women's Unit 2000).

⁶⁵ There is some evidence that problems are increasing, but differentiation between girls and boys decreasing. For example, more boys are being diagnosed with anorexia (Langley, 2005) and 15 year old girls now report drinking on a more regular basis than boys (Hoyle, 2005).

Appendix 3: Further information about WBS, and the setting up of SfL.

WBS had a long and varied history. Some of the older members of staff had taught in the school when it had been selective. The majority of senior teachers in the school were male, however, WBS was unusual in being one of two boys schools in London in the early 1980s with a woman Deputy Head. In 1982 all Heads of Department were men and of the 58 full-time members of the teaching staff, 16 were women.

Between the world wars WBS had a high percentage (about 50%) of Jewish boys. From the early 1960s Afro-Caribbean pupils came to form the majority population. In the early 1980s these pupils were joined by smaller groups of pupils, mostly from Cyprus, Turkey and Asia (pupils from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Vietnam). In September 1982 the *bilingual* population of WBS was still small compared with that of many London schools, a survey at the time showed that about half a dozen boys per class were bilingual (average class size was then 23) and that the majority of those were advanced learners of English or of second generation, with all or most of their schooling in Britain. During the school year 1983-84 there was an increase in their numbers as more pupils migrated from Vietnam, Bangladesh, Hong Kong, and Turkey. This percentage continued to increase over the next five years. In the mid-1980s schools were required to provide information about the characteristics of children attending the school for the new Educational Priority Index. This included information about the numbers of children having free meals, size of family, family structure, parental occupation, languages other than English and ethnic background. Information collected in 1986 showed that in WBS, 52% of children had free school meals, 29% were from lone-parent families and 30% spoke English as a second language. This meant that the school had a high ranking on the Educational Priority Index (EPI). The intake had been strongly weighted towards band 3 for some years when I joined the school in 1982. The ability range of the intake was low in comparison with other Inner London schools, with scores on the London Reading Test the lowest in the Borough.

The Women's Group

The original idea for SfL came from the Women's group in the school. This group had formed in January 1980 for the purpose of sharing experiences of working in a boys' school with a focus on experiences of sexism. The women's group met on a fortnightly basis at lunchtime. I joined the group when I was appointed to the school in 1982.

The women's group was not a curriculum working party, since it originally formed as a support group. However, it was agreed that one response to sexual harassment was a curriculum initiative. The women's group decided to involve male teachers in setting up a 'Skills for Living' working party.

The Skills for Living working party

This group met regularly from late 1980. In September 1982, when I was appointed, it had a core membership of twelve staff who attempted to operate a non-hierarchical, democratic decision making process. The membership included men and women from subject departments across the school. This innovation, like many in the 1970s and early 1980s was a grass roots problem-solving initiative, unlike contemporary innovation which is generally the response to Government directives and involves adopting ready made ideas, practices or sets of materials. Problem-solving innovations were defined by Havelock (1978) as starting with the identification of a need, followed by diagnosis of the problem, a search for solutions, testing the solution, leading to adaptation. (Havelock, 1978 in Curriculum Design and Development, OU. Unit 22). The existence of both the women's group and the SfL working party indicates the level of teacher autonomy at the time.

During 1981 three full staff meetings were held to raise whole staff awareness of sexism, outline ideas for the SfL course and begin to develop a whole school policy on sex equity and anti-sexism. In spring and summer of 1982 some pilot SfL lessons were taught and evaluated by teachers in the school. The school had been successful in gaining funds from the L.E.A. to convert a classroom for home economics. Successful bids were made to both the LEA to appoint a teacher to teach, develop and co-ordinate the course, and the E.O.C. for a grant to cover costs of evaluation. I was subsequently appointed as a full-time member of staff in September 1982 to teach all SfL classes, develop the course and jointly evaluate the work, and at the same time CR was appointed for one and a half days as an external evaluator.

Appendix 4: Questionnaire used with women teachers in the 1980s.

Name _____ School _____

Open Questionnaire for WOMEN TEACHERS

Please fill in and return to Sue Askew, Isledon Teachers Centre, Blackstock Rd, London N4.

We would prefer if you would state your name and school, which will be treated confidentially. However, please send anonymously rather than not at all.

Please continue on another sheet if you want to.

1. Please describe your experiences as a women teaching boys. (Do you feel you have to change your teaching style in order to be taken seriously? Are you regarded as 'soft' etc.)

2. Please describe your relationships with the boys and the male members of staff.

3. Please describe how you feel at staff meetings. (How are they organised? Is it easy for you to contribute? Are you listened to? Are you taken seriously?)

4. Please describe the sorts of discipline problems you may have experienced and why you think it happens.

5. Can you describe any patterns you may have identified in the way boys behave towards each other?

6. Is there any pastoral time in school? (Is there a whole school policy on the pastoral curriculum? How much time is allowed? What is the purpose of pastoral time? What kind of support does it have from the staff as a whole?)

7. Is sexual harassment a problem in your school? (Including written, verbal and physical harassment; what was done about it? What channels of complaint do women have?)

8. Any other comments? (Please continue on a separate sheet).

Appendix 5. Final aims for SfL

The rationale for the course is to extend the restricted curriculum opportunities in an all boys' school and to combat sexism. The approach is two-fold:

1. To provide equal curriculum opportunity (including foodwork, childcare studies, domestic crafts) to help boys to learn to take domestic responsibility and not to regard this as a woman's realm.

2. To combat sexist by:

a. helping boys to learn to express themselves and relate to others in ways traditionally considered to be within the female realm and not masculine attributes; developing behaviour which is often repressed in boys and men (this includes communicating in intimate ways; co-operation rather than competition; being supportive to each other; feeling responsible for the emotional well being of each other).

b. exploring explicit gender issues.

In this context the following aims can be worked towards:

- An examination of male and female stereotypical roles, attitudes and values.
- An awareness of the ways in which sex-role stereotyping imposes limits on the behaviour of both men/boys and women/girls.
- An exploration of positive alternatives to sex-role stereotypical behaviour.

Appendix 6:

A policy for sex equity and anti-sexism in Hackney Downs

Introductory

Examples of the promotion of equal opportunities and of anti-sexist initiatives within schools have sprung mainly from all-girls' schools or co-educational establishments. Hackney Downs is – at present – an all boys' school, which collaborates at the 16–19 age level with girls from Clapton and Hackney Free.

While not denying the massive evidence of unequal opportunities for girls in education, nor minimising the seriousness of sexist behaviour, attitudes and language which threaten and assault females in this school, our pupils are also victims of sex stereotypical roles. Neither the overt nor the covert curriculum of Hackney Downs has yet taken up or acted upon these issues in much depth or consistent commitment.

One major problem which at the moment has been responded to by the Skills for Living working party, is the paucity of provision of education for sexual self-definition, relationships between the sexes, parenthood and domestic responsibility. Socially formed attitudes to women and work are part of the problem; there IS a stereotyped male ethos in the school and we wish to encourage initiatives to counter this and set out a clearer statement of policy and positive structures for lines of action.

A policy for sex equity and anti-sexism is a whole school policy, in the same way our commitment to multi-ethnic education is a whole school policy. Just as anti-racism is not the responsibility only of black members of our community, neither is anti-sexism the responsibility only of the Women's Group and the female members of staff.

Fairness to both sexes is the basic principle which should inform our policy and our practice. This involves action which is positive in redressing our rejection of sex stereotyping and sexism.

This requires of us:

- (a) a shared understanding by all staff of the nature of sex stereotyping and sexism;
- (b) consensus among us about the desirability of change and about methods.

- (c) commitment to carrying through positive changes over a period of time, to monitoring and reappraisal;
- (d) commitment to continuing anti-sexist action;
- (e) resources, particularly time, for all to work out the implications of their own role and for discussion with others;
- (f) the formulation, adoption and implementation of a written policy for sex equity and anti-sexism which is a whole school policy.

School policy on sex equity and anti-sexism

- 1 Issues of sexism are taken seriously and are dealt with as we expect issues of racism to be dealt with. (Our normal procedures include a personal response on the spot; supporting and being supported by colleagues who are nearby; discussion with the offenders; consultation with form tutors, Heads of Department, Heads of House; selection of appropriate follow-up for individuals or whole classes by those most likely to be effective – female and male.)
 - (a) Incidents of sexual violence, verbal and physical, are responded to immediately, from a sense of collective responsibility.
 - (b) Expressions of sexist attitudes and opinions do not pass unheard. As a whole staff we make an overt stand on principle against sexism.
 - (c) To gauge the extent and nature of the problem we kept a record of all such incidents for at least one term.
- 2 There should be in-service training available for staff on anti-sexist education.
- 3 Departments (including the Library and Media Resources) will examine materials and resources for sexist content and look for ways to redress the balance.
- 4 Positive anti-sexist content will be in current courses, especially in Careers, Craft, Humanities and Science. The range of extra-curricular activity will be examined for similar anti-sexist activity; we could try to organise group activities which include girls from other schools, or encourage interest in events, outings, exhibitions etc. beyond the stereotypical 'boys only' ones.
- 5 Heads of House and Heads of Department will ensure that issues of sex equity and anti-sexism are on their meeting agendas at least once a term. This includes form tutor meetings and department meetings.

- 6 The Curriculum Study Group will examine the whole curriculum with reference to sex equity and anti-sexism in the courses on offer and selection of options. They will consider ways to redress any imbalance, and report to the staff, parents and governors.
- 7(a) Anti-sexist and sex equitable initiatives will be encouraged and supported. Cross-curricular areas like the Library and Media Resources department may need particular support, but as a whole school we could also initiate moves concerning display material around school, film hire, visiting speakers, and theatre companies, and publishing within the school.
- (b) Financial resources will be allocated to anti-sexist and sex equitable initiatives. (As in the past we have funded initiatives on issues of class, race and language, which are continuing.)

Dealing with incidents of sexual assault

Hackney Downs School is inexperienced at handling such incidents. It was felt necessary to focus on the issues and problems separately from other incidents of assault. It is important that we become confident and aware, so that effective action can be taken. These notes refer to cases where the assailant is identified.

Sexual assault is an aspect of women's experience in an all boys' school and some men find it difficult to see any difference between a sexual assault and other forms of assault suffered by staff. It is an act of violence against a person, it is an act of deliberate hostility which focuses on the sexual organs of the victim to demean and humiliate. It is this intention which distinguishes sexual assault from other forms of physical contact – the hostile ones which inflict physical hurt, the friendly ones which communicate caring.

Victims of sexual assault will be supported without question, on the assumption that no one makes up that kind of accusation. Once the victim has reported the incident she will not be called upon to give a public account of it again unless she wishes to do so; the Head, Deputy or House Tutor will intercede for and represent the victim. Should it be a case ending in a suspension and a governors' hearing the Head will represent the victim's case unless she prefers to do so herself.

Members of staff dealing with pupil (and parent) over the case must take great care in discussing it.

Year 1

1. Housework

Make a list of all the jobs which have to be done in your house - how often do they have to be done, how much time do they take. Which jobs do you do. Class list and report back from the groups.

Dividing up the housework
(worksheets, appendix 23 and 24).

This is the WORK that you want to do in the HOUSE today:

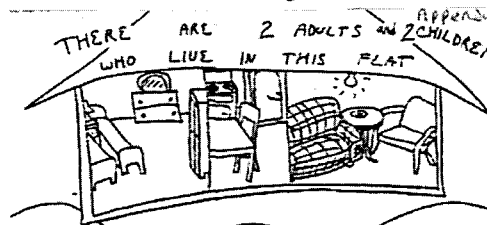


Choose a housework task from the list to do as homework. Fill in the worksheet. Appendix 25.

THREE JOBS TAKE ABOUT:		
1/2 HOUR	1/2 HOUR	1 HOUR
pulling up a rope a foot	making weak	mixing plaster
hammering up a nail	hammering	chopping
hammering up a nail	playing up	cleaning windows
hammering up a nail	ironing	washing clothes
making the beds	repair clothes	
cleaning		

1. SHOW HOW YOU WOULD ORGANISE YOUR DAY:

THERE ARE 2 ADULTS AND 2 CHILDREN WHO LIVE IN THIS FLAT



2. Divide up the housework
so Everyone gets some
Free Time.
* Make it fair!

3. ONE of the children is called Bill.

WRITE a story OR
DRAW a cartoon
about Bill's day.
*INCLUDE his share of the housework.

Design for ←
pattern (appendix
26).

Making an apron

3 practical food work

There are six suggested practical food sessions -

- cheese and potato pie
- bread and pizza
- pancakes with different fillings
- vegetable curry and rice

The other two sessions involve some choice (see over the page).

Alternative food sessions
In the first year of the course we didn't have any cooking facilities, so had the following:

- coleslaw
- fruit salad and yoghurt
- various sandwiches including toasted.
- meal made at home and served to a visitor.

Follow up

Worksheet (appendix 27).

Food vs. eggs

Appendix 27

Ingredients (Draw them or make a list):

Drawings of the finished food

Describe how we made it (write or draw cartoons)

Total cost:

4 Planning meals

Worksheet
(appendix 28 and 29 cut into cards).

Make A Meal

Appendix 29

You need:

1. a Staple filler
2. Some fruit or vegetables
3. Some fibre
4. Some fat
5. Extra protein

Appendix 28

Here Are Some STAPLE FILLERS:

For A Balanced Diet, you need lots of different food. CHOOSE a card to add to the Staple Filler to make a Complete Meal.

STAPLE FILLER:	ADDITIONS:
Bread	1. cheese, butter, tomatoes
	2.
	3.
Rice	1.
	2.
	3.
Potatoes	1.



Practical food work cont.

- e. planning a meal -
using either potato,
rice or bread, plan a
meal for the people in
your group.

- f. receiving a visitor -
plan to receive a
visitor, make a meal
for your visitor, decide
how you will make the person
welcome and comfortable.
Write an invitation, role
play, etc.

(We spent two weeks on
the above two sessions,
one in planning and the
other in actually making).

Planning for your meal
worksheet (Appendix 30)

PLANNING FOR YOUR MEAL

Appendix 30

Names of people in your group:

Ingredients:	Person buying it:
How to make it:	Person doing it:
Cleaning up jobs:	Person doing it:

Follow up

Planning for a picnic
worksheet (appendix
31) When we did this
the boys did the
planning in school,
but organised the
shopping and cooking
in their own time - on
a specified budget.

Appendix 31.

Planning for a picnic

Which drink does everyone like?

Which savoury does everyone like?

Which sweet thing does everyone like?

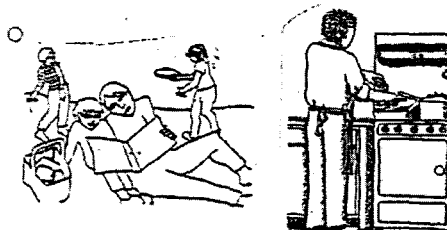
What will we need to buy?

How much money have we to spend?

What will we wrap the food in?

How will we bring it to the picnic?

Does everyone have a job?



Food advertisements

Recall and share
a food advertisement -

how does it try to make
you want to buy its
product.

does it make you want
to buy the food.

who's making the food.

who's eating the food.

Follow up

Ways advertisements make
you want to buy their
products. Worksheet
(appendix 32).

Appendix 32

Ways advertisements make you want
to buy their products.

1. Look at the video of advertisements or
the advertisements in magazines.

2. Fill in the chart.

Name of product			
What is the advertisement selling?			
Does the advertisement give:			
Free offer			
Money off			
Free sample			
Picture of someone liking it.			
Does it seem that you are a special kind of person if you buy it.			
Other things: e.g. a catchy tune.			

Follow up

How do advertisements
make girls/women and
boys/men look. Worksheet
(appendix 33).

Follow up

Making advertisements.
Worksheet (appendix 34).

Appendix 33

**HOW DO ADVERTISEMENTS
MAKE GIRLS/WOMEN AND BOYS/MEN
LOOK?**

COOL, NICE, CUTE, Popular, Sweet, STRONGER, TOUGH, Clean, Healthy

NAME OF PRODUCT: _____ COMMENTS: _____

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Appendix 34

BUY OUR PRODUCT!! **BUY Today**

How to make advertisements you could:

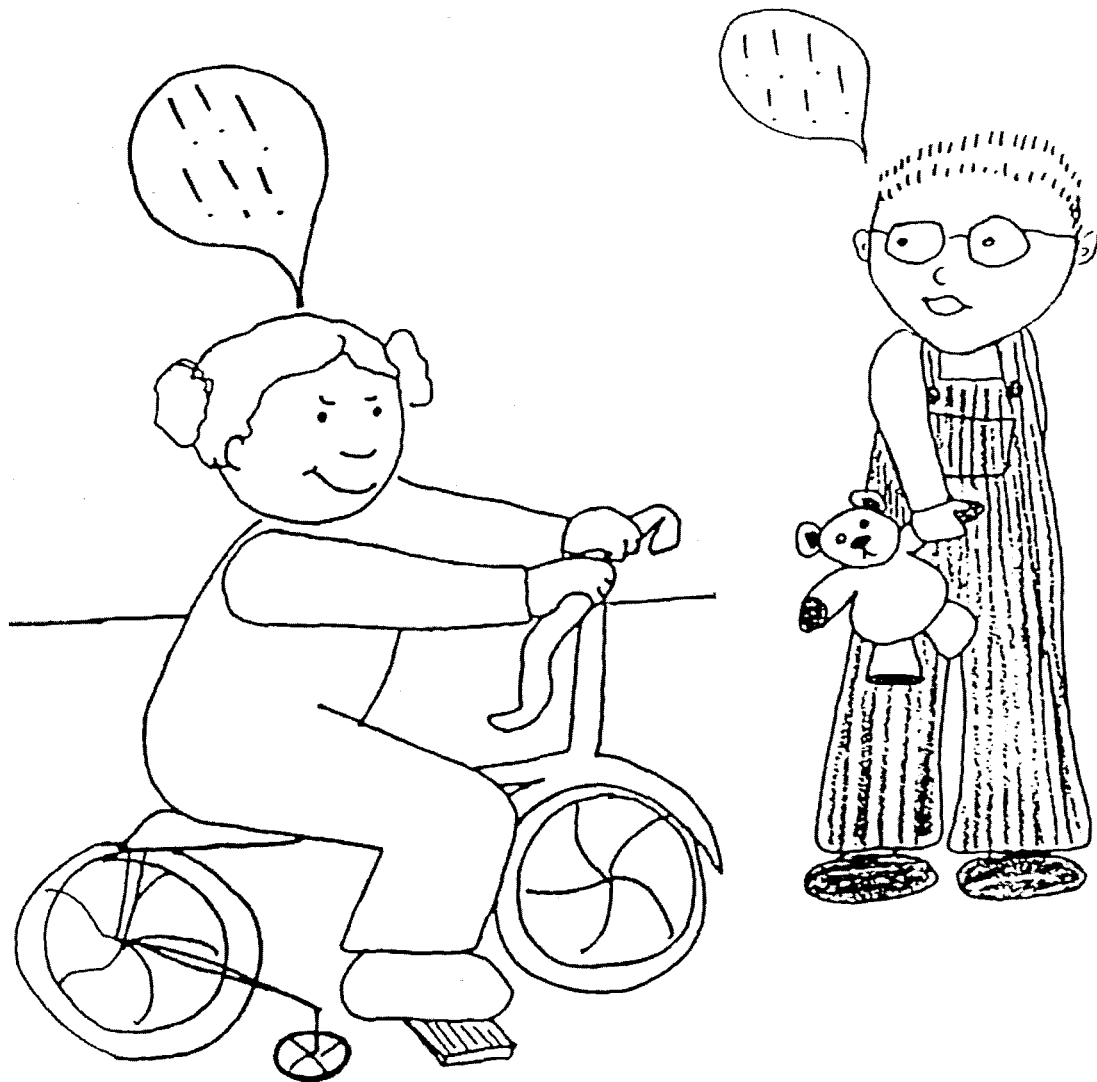
1. Make a poster to sell an imaginary product, or
2. Make up a television advertisement (script or role play, or
3. Make up a jingle to sell the product.

*** Decide who the advertisement is meant for.**

BUY IT **You'll Love It!** **GET WITH IT** **ONE BUY NOW!** **GET IT** **Get On!** **Be Beautiful!!!!** **Be Beautiful!!** **Be Happy!!!**

SUPER GLOP

Early Childhood



Anti-sexist materials for boys. ~

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Aims of materials

- To extend equal opportunities by offering boys the chance to learn about young children.
- To encourage boys to regard child care as the concern of males as well as females.
- To challenge role stereotyped images of male and female.
- To examine how children are socialised into gender stereotypes.
- To facilitate boys in sharing their experiences and relate on a more personal level.

CONTENTS

- 1 My childhood - story
- 2 Activity Book
- 3 Stereotypes in children's books - posters 1 and 2.
- 4 Write your own children's book - worksheet
- 5 Mary and Max - booklet
- 6 What are little girls/boys made of - poster
- 7 Photo series
- 8 Case studies 1 and 2
- 9 Extract from 'Tyke Tyler'

Ideas for use and issues arising

Although some of these materials work well in conjunction with one another they do not make up a cohesive scheme of work. Teachers who have piloted this work have found it most successful when introduced by discussion about pupils' own childhood memories, and personal experiences with young children (see case study).

1 My childhood - story

This has been used to introduce the area of childhood and set the tone for personalising the discussion. Pupils wrote and shared their own stories about early childhood as a way of beginning to think about what young children feel and need.

2 Activity book

This booklet is intended to allow pupils some choice about which activity they do while at the same time allowing a classroom atmosphere which is less teacher directed. In the lessons where we piloted this booklet the activities sometimes led to individual or small group projects which then formed a whole class presentation.

3 Poster set on stereotypes in children's books ('Even when we were little' and 'Why don't children's books?')

If the first poster isn't used alongside the second poster there is a danger that it will reinforce stereotypes. It is intended to point out some of the gender stereotypes in children's books. However as these stereotypes are so 'normalised' it may be useful to examine them in conjunction with contrasting positive images.

- (a) The teacher piloting the posters brought in a selection of children's books, some of which showed stereotypes, such as race and gender (eg, 'Noddy' and 'Peter and Jane') and some which presented alternative images.
- (b) The boys looked at whether most of the characters were white and where they were black characters, what they were doing. They also looked at the sorts of things girls and boys were doing.
- (c) In groups the boys tried to identify the sort of messages being given by the books about how people of different sex, race, age, etc. 'should' behave and look.

4 Write your own children's book - worksheet

This has been found to be a good follow-up to the poster set.

5 Mary and Max - booklet

In this booklet the images contradict the gender stereotypes of the captions.

- (a) The bubbles are intended for the pupils to fill in. They should show what the children in the booklet are actually either thinking or saying.
- (b) The boys filled in the booklet individually and then compared their captions in groups.
- (c) This was followed-up by drawing their own cartoon strips showing people rebelling from traditional stereotyped images.
- (d) In groups the boys devised a situation for role play where the characters were repudiating or deviating from stereotyped behaviour.

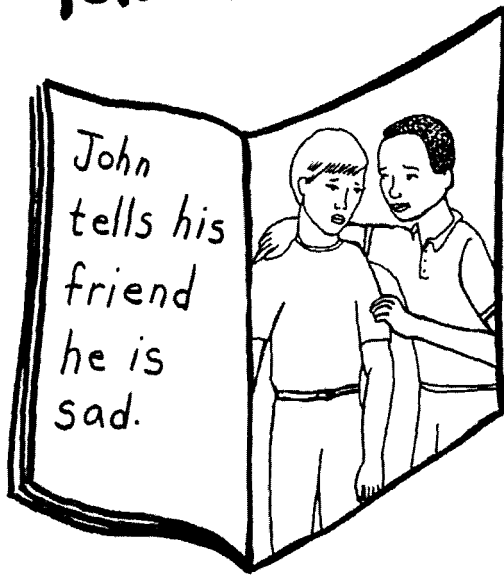
EVEN WHEN WE WERE LITTLE BOOKS Told Us How To ACT



Can you Remember The STEREOTYPES
in Your CHILDHOOD BOOKS??

CAROL ROSS

WHY DON'T MOST CHILDREN'S BOOKS Tell Us We Can Act Like This?



Lets End STEREOTYPES
in Children's Books!

CAROL ROSS

WHAT are Little ~~Boys~~ Girls MADE OF?



produced by Hackney Downs School Women's Group

Carl Rose

Who Decides Which TOYS Boys & Girls Should LIKE?

ISSUES PARTICULARLY RELATING TO WOMEN TEACHERS



"Women in boys' schools have particular problems to deal with."

Women's Experience of Sexism.

Fill in the questionnaire below independently as a starting point for discussion.

As a woman teacher do you ever feel you are affected by:

	Never	Occasionally	Often
a. Not having your point of view taken seriously.			
b. Being treated by men or boys as if you are 'invisible'.			
c. Not having your feelings taken into consideration.			
d. Being 'passed over' or not chosen for something.			
e. People's judgments about how you should behave.			
f. People's judgments about how you should look.			
g. changing your behaviour depending on whether there's a man present.			
h. Feeling guilty about your own needs and aspirations.			
i. Being unable to achieve meaningful personal communication with a man.			
j. Being restricted in your opportunities.			

In pairs

Think of examples under the headings or other examples of sexism. Please record at least one example below.

In small groups

Share and discuss the examples.

Some Controversial Issues in the Women's Liberation Movement

Where do you stand?

	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
1. The women's movement is aimed at white middle-class women.			
2. Men are oppressive because of the structure of our society.			
3. Men all over the world are oppressive, regardless of the kind of society they live in.			
4. Sexism is only one aspect of oppression and affects women differently according to race and class.			
5. It's important for women/girls to be able to meet together without men.			
6. Heterosexuality and feminism don't mix.			
7. Male violence permeates most aspects of our society and is structured into it.			

- a. Fill the questionnaire in individually.
- b. Compare and discuss in pairs.
- c. Decide between you which statement you would like to discuss in the whole group.

Whole Group

Discuss those statements that have priority for the group.

How do Women Experience Sexism in Boys' Schools?

Individually

1. Read the quotes below (these are statements from women at previous workshops).
2. Decide whether or not it's true in your experience and place yourself on the continuum.

"As a woman teacher in an all-boys' school I feel almost 'invisible' sometimes. I think there is a male culture in the classroom that I can never enter into."

True in my _____ Not true in my
experience experience

"If women teachers are sexually harassed in school they are seen as the problem either as hysterical or neurotic – the school has no structures to either prevent or deal with harassment."

True in my _____ Not true in my
experience experience

"I feel when I teach boys I have to be much more authoritarian and aggressive than I want to be, otherwise they take absolutely no notice."

True in my _____ Not true in my
experience experience

"I find myself being undermined by male colleagues – sometimes when they think they are 'protecting' me."

True in my _____ Not true in my
experience experience

"I find it very hard to make myself actually 'heard' in staff meetings when I finally do speak. I think the way they are organised discourages proper discussion and shared decision making."

True in my _____ Not true in my
experience experience

3. Divide into small groups. Compare and discuss your assessments.

The Women's Group in School – what is it for?

We have used this workshop both with women trying to set up a women's' group and established women's' groups who want to think about their future.

1. Individually

Prioritise the list (You could have more than one priority and add your own).

Depending on how large the group is, either come together as one, or as small groups to compare and prioritise.

Try to establish a few priorities as a whole group.

2. Either as a whole group or as a small group

Start discussing how you could put your priorities into practice and how to implement them. It may be useful to consider the points below, which came out of the January weekend conference for women.

- Consciousness Raising
- Giving support to one another
- Dealing with sexual harassment
- Looking at the position of women teachers in the school and make suggestions (number and position in the hierarchy)
- Taking on the planning of an anti-sexist conference or whole school meeting, etc.
- Practicing difficult situations
- Dealing with hostilities toward the women's' group
- Looking at curricula imbalance and content including resources
- Producing documents and written statements
- Fighting invisibility in school meetings
- Looking at sexist issues in relation to race and class issues
- Producing own resources
- Thinking about ways of working with the Unions
- Assertion Training

Points for consideration

- a. The tasks are so huge that it may be useful to be precise about where you put your energies – look for chinks in the school situation where inroads may be possible.
- b. Specific objectives within the priorities are helpful.
- c. Is it possible to include more women in the school, including non-teaching staff?

Sexual Harassment

What is it?

1. Read the quotes below:

The description 'sexual harassment' itself rings wrong. To me it conjures up images of 'moments', episodes of coercion, bad times. Sexual harassment is all these things to women...but there is also something overwhelmingly ordinary, tedious and day to day about it. The point is, isn't sexual harassment really about masculinity? And shouldn't any campaign against it contain some recognition of, and commitment to change,

masculinity – rather than simply to amend ‘unacceptable’, ‘individual’ male ‘behaviour’ (Melissa Benn. Isn’t sexual harassment really about masculinity? Spare Rib, Issue 156. July 1985).

Sexual harassment is any behaviour that identifies you as a sexual object.

Sexual harassment can be very subtle. It can seem like a joke, but leave you feeling sick inside.

2. In pairs

From your experience brainstorm all forms of sexual harassment, including the more subtle forms, which are sometimes described as ‘in fun’ or ‘harmless’. You needn’t confine your list to school.

Below are some examples of things other women have said:

“I went to cover a class of 5th year boys I didn’t know. As I walked in one of them said “I wouldn’t come in here if I was you, you might get raped.”

“Every time I turned by back on a first year class of boys one of them touched my bum. When I turned around they sat ‘innocently’. I felt completely humiliated. How could they take me seriously as a teacher when they were touching my bum?”

“ A male colleague said to me, ‘I’ll bet you don’t have any trouble with the sixth form boys when you wear that!’”

2. Make a whole group list of types of sexual harassment.

Discuss:

- a. Why each is sexual harassment.
- b. What is the common denominator in terms of male assumptions and attitudes to women?

Dealing with Sexual Harassment

1. The following are some ideas that came out of a weekend conference for women:

- a. There needs to be a structure for dealing with sexual harassment – a consistent approach to the problem.
 - b. Sexual harassment must be made recognizable and visible.
 - c. It needs to be visible in the school that women are in an official position to respond to and deal with sexual harassment.
 - d. Women must have the option to have cases of sexual harassment dealt with by women only.
 - e. The women dealing with the cases of sexual harassment should not be asked to break confidentiality. To spread around details of the incident is to compound sexual harassment.
 - f. Sexual harassment must be put on the agenda for discussion in schools. It needs to be clearly defined in order to make it clear what it is and that it’s not the ‘fault’ of individual women or girls.
 - g. Keep a record of incidents to make more visible the scope of the problem.
 - h. Sexual harassment undermines the woman teacher’s authority - it should be made clear that sexual harassment does not occur because she can’t control the class.
2. Consider strategies for dealing with sexual harassment in your school.
 3. Draw up a plan of action.

Women Teachers Responding to Sexism

Many women in workshops have talked about their need to practice responding to sexist situations. Below are some of the situations women have mentioned.

1. Divide into groups of 3.
2. Take it in turns to pick a different situation or bring your own situation.
3. The first person takes the role of behaving in the problematic way.
The second person practices responding.
The third person observes the interaction and gives feed back.
4. It may be helpful to practice the situation several times and to swop over roles.

Some difficult situations

You are in the staffroom. A male colleague comes up to you and suddenly comes out with: "I hear you've been stirring things up again. We didn't have any problems with sexism before the Women's group got going."	You are in a departmental meeting. You want a discussion about something you really feel is important. You've made your point, but it has just been passed over. You decide this is so important you are going to be assertive about it.
You're having a discussion about sexism and women's position in the school. A woman teacher says: "But look at me. I'm a woman and I've risen up the hierarchy".	The women's' group in the school is meeting opposition from some teachers. A teacher comes up to you and says: "I don't think we should have a women's group in the school. It's sexist not to let men in".
You're in the middle of a lesson when a male colleague comes in and tells the class to be quiet. You feel undermined and you want to talk to him about it after the lesson. You know he thinks he was helping.	You feel you're having difficulty with discipline in some of your lessons because the boys aren't taking you seriously as a teacher because you're a woman. When you go to your Head of Department to talk about this it's obvious that he thinks the problem is you. He says: "How about spending a couple of lessons observing John. I'm sure you'll learn a lot from him".

Appendix 10: Further information about schools in part two.

Sixteen women teachers from four inner London Schools were interviewed using a snowballing technique. The four schools reflected a range of different kinds of school including:

- (i) a City technology college in a socially deprived area with a predominantly black and minority ethnic population (Edgerton)
- (ii) a former grammar school with a good record of examination results in an affluent area that is predominantly white, but with a sizeable Bengali and Caribbean intake (Thomas Baker)
- (iii) a comprehensive school with religious affiliation that is predominantly white, but with a sizeable African and Caribbean population (St. Francis)
- (iv) a school in a mixed catchment area and with a balanced ethnic intake (Cliff Edge)

St. FRANCIS.

Boys' comprehensive. Approx 1200 pupils. Sixth form. Criterion for joining school – catholic. At the end of the first term in the first year pupils divided into two bands (no mixed ability). Ethnically mixed: 'Quite a lot' of African boys. High percentage of female teachers – 37 out of 79 teachers (20 years ago only 3 women teachers). Very good results. 'A lot of value added'. Teach Latin and classics. Big emphasis on sport. Very formal: call the boys 'gentlemen'. No PSHE.

CLIFF EDGE

Described by one of the women teachers as a 'proper' comprehensive school, and 'a very multi-racial school'. Balanced intake in years 7,8,9. Mixed Ability. About 40% of the boys are Afro-Caribbean, 30% white and 30% 'other' – some Asian, Kurds, refugees from Yugoslavia, African. 1200 on roll and 6th form of about 220: consortium with a neighbouring girls and a mixed school. Described as 'a happy school, where there's generally very good relationships between staff and pupils: corridors are not too bad and generally a safe environment'. Large number of female staff. Very good results. In 2002 42% achieved 5 A-C's. PSHE taught by a team of teachers (rather than form tutors) and policies on 'everything' including bullying.

EGGERTON

City Technology College in deprived working class area. 8 form entry, almost 2000 pupils on roll. Streamed quite rigidly. Large numbers of pupils have free school dinners, are refugee and asylum seekers. A lot of pupils have difficult family backgrounds. A number of children live with grandparents or other relatives and their parents are overseas. The biggest ethnic group is African, followed by Caribbean. There is a 'sizeable' Turkish and Kurdish, Indian, Bengali community. Very few white boys: 'a sprinkling of white working class boys'.

THOMAS BAKER

Former grammar school, now comprehensive. Part of sixth form consortium. Good reputation in the locality. Described as 'quite a traditional school. It lives off its tradition', and as 'a little outdated' by another woman. Quite a small number of female staff (12). Deputy Head female, and one head of year. Ethnically and socially mixed with a fairly large Bengali and Afro-Caribbean population. White pupils in the majority (both working class and middle class).

Appendix 11: Focus questions for interviews with women in the 2000s and profile of the women teachers.

Areas covered in discussion with women teachers

- (i) Teaching experience (subject/responsibilities/girls' school/co-ed school?)
- (ii) If taught previously in co-ed/girls schools – any difference in experience?
- (iii) Thoughts about boys and teaching in boys' schools? (prompt – sexual harassment?)
- (iv) Observations about boys' behaviour and approach to learning (any surprises? Any unexpected behaviours?)
- (v) If taught boys for many years – any changes in boys noticed?
- (vi) Perceptions of approaches to discipline
- (vii) Perceptions of approaches to teaching and learning
- (viii) Information about pastoral systems/PSHE/policies on bullying etc
- (ix) Thoughts about strategies for working with boys
- (x) Explanations for any observations about boys/boys schools? Or if worked in a mixed school, between working in boys schools/mixed schools/girls schools.

Profile of interviewees.

Initials and date of interview	School	Years teaching in this school	Number of years teaching in 2003	Subject/role	Previous experience
Freda 23 rd Jan 2003	St. Francis	2nd year	29 years	Senior teacher. Head of sociology, careers and guidance. Responsible for placing underachieving boys on placements, and for gifted and talented, NRA, mentoring programme and sex education. Teaches A level sociology.	Started teaching in East London in 1974 in a mixed comprehensive. Worked in further education – liberal studies and general studies with all male groups - apprenticeships in plumbing, butchers, plastering, and electricians. Back to different 'reasonably tough' mixed comprehensive in deprived Inner city school in 1979 for 20 years.
Fay 23 rd Jan 2003	St. Francis	6 th year	6 years	Teacher of history and law.	Only school taught in. During PGCE year teaching experience at a mixed grammar school and before that a lawyer.
Fran 23 rd Jan 2003	St. Francis	14th year	16 years	Head of Year, teacher of year 8, geography, economics, business studies .	Born and taught for 2 years in girls' school in East Africa before coming to teach at St. Francis.
Faith*	St. Francis	3 rd year	7 years	Teacher of	Taught in local girls'

28 th Jan 2003				English and responsible for English as an Additional language.	school for 4 years. Before that taught in Zimbabwe, and various other jobs.
Ellen 7 th Feb 2003	Edgerton	4 th year	11 years	2 nd i/c science. Deputy head of year.	Taught in a number of schools in the area as a supply teacher for several years, including mixed and girls' schools. Taught in Spain for two years and before coming into teaching worked as social worker.
Elizabeth 7 th Feb 2003	Edgerton	11th year	15 years	Part of support team	Taught in this area of Inner City for all teaching Career. Began by teaching in Primary Schools, and before current post part of the support team going into primary schools.
Emily 15 th Feb 2003	Edgerton	1 st year	3 years	English teacher, form tutor year 7	Emily did her teaching practice in a girls' school and taught for two years in a mixed school in another large city.
Eileen 15 th Feb 2003	Edgerton	2nd year	29 years	Head of English	Previously taught in neighbouring mixed secondary for 11 years. Before that in a neighbouring girls school for 12 years. Started teaching in 1974. Taught in further education before that.
Caroline 16 th Feb 2003	Cliff Edge	2 nd year	5 years	2 nd ic English	Taught in a girls' school on Teaching practice. Previously taught in a mixed school in same locality. Taught for 1 year in America in mixed high school (mainly age 17-18)
Cass 16 th Feb 2003	Cliff Edge	2nd year	3 years	Art teacher	Part-time art teacher. Also works as an artist. Previously taught for 1 year in a girls' school in a small country town.
Connie 16 th Feb 2003	Cliff Edge	8 th year	18 years	Head of Science	Previously taught in a girls' school in the same city, and before that in mixed school in North of England.
Cynthia 16 th Feb 2003	Cliff Edge	3 years	9 years	Head of IT, also IT co-coordinator in the school. Form 10 tutor (tutor to same	3 years previously in another Inner City area learning support team (working with 90% boys) 3 years before that a mixed

				group for 2 years)	city technology secondary school.
Tessa 8 th July 2003	Thomas Baker	3 years	8 years	Head of language	Previously taught in inner London girls' school and 7 months in boys' school in deprived Inner City area. Taught in Europe.
Tamsin 8 th July 2003	Thomas Baker	1 st year	9 years	Modern Foreign language teacher. Advanced skills teacher.	Taught in mixed, neighbouring Inner City school for 7 and half years.
Toni 5 th May 2003	Thomas Baker	6th year	11 years	Science teacher. Form teacher year 9.	Taught in boys' school in same LEA previously. Has also taught in mixed school.
Thelma 5 th May 2003	Thomas Baker	1 ST year	14 years	History teacher. Form teacher year 7.	10 years at a co-ed Roman Catholic School in Inner City which was also mixed ability in year 7. Before that taught at Ralston Catholic High – all boys school. Teaching practice at all girls' school in deprived Inner City area.

